Film QUARTERLY

INDEX TO VOLUME XXXVII

Titles of books and films reviewed appear in *italics*. First reference number indicates volume number, second indicates issue number, third indicates page. Major topics are also indexed.

About John Ford. 37:1:29
American Directors. 37:3:63
Andrzej Wajda's Reign of Terror: *Danton's* Polish Ambiance. 37:2:27
Argent, L'. 37:4:18
Armstrong, Dan. Wiseman's *Model* and the Documentary Project: Towards a Radical Film Practice. 37:2:2
Bachmann, Gideon. The Carrots Are Cooked: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard. 37:3:13
Bad at the Bijou. 37:1:55
Bad Boys. 37:1:27
Balkan Cinema. 37:1:40
Benn, Kate. *The Dream Beside Me.* 37:1:40
Bernardoni, James. *George Roy Hill.* 37:4:57
Between Flops: A Biography of Preston Sturges. 37:1:31
Books. 37:4:27
Born in Flames. 37:4:22
Boyd, David. *Persona* and the Cinema of Interpretation. 37:2:10
Brakhage, Stan. 37:3:49
Bresson, Robert. 37:4:18
Brunette, Peter. *Luchino Visconti.* 37:4:59
Burch, Noël. 37:3:4
Burton, Julianne. *Les Cinémas de l'Amérique Latine.* 37:1:38
Callenbach, Ernest. *Cinema East.* 37:4:41
_____. *Faulkner's MGM Screenplays.* 37:1:46
_____. *The Macmillan Film Bibliography.* 37:1:43
_____. *Roman.* 37:4:28
The Carrots are Cooked: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard. 37:3:13
Cary Grant: A Celebration. 37:4:30
Charles Ahearn: *Wild Style.* 37:4:2
Cineaste *Interviews, The.* 37:1:54
Cinema East: A Critical Study of Major Japanese Films. 37:4:41
Cinema 16: An Interview with Amos Vogel. 37:3:19
Cinema Stylists. 37:4:33
Cinémas de l'Amérique Latine, Les. 37:1:38
Cocaine Fiends and Reefer Madness: An Illustrated History of Drugs in the Movies. 37:1:38
Confessions of a Feminist Porn Programmer. 37:1:9
Constant Factor, The. 37:2:19
Contract. 37:2:19
Cooper, Darius. *Gandhi.* 37:2:43
Corrigan. Timothy. On the Edge of History: The Radiant Spectacle of Werner Schroeter. 37:4:6
Joan Crawford. 37:4:30
Daniel. 37:3:32
Danton. 37:2:27
Dark Side of Genius, The: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock. 37:1:34
Death Watch. 37:1:16
Desowitz, Bill. *A Passion for Films.* 37:4:28
Difficulty of Moral Choice: Zanussi's *Contract* and *The Constant Factor.* 37:2:19
Doherty, Tom. *Bad Boys.* 37:1:27
_____. *Cocaine Fiends and Reefer Madness.* 37:1:38
_____. *Indelible Shadows.* 37:4:39
_____. *Midnight Movies.* 37:1:54
_____. *Silkwood.* 37:4:24
_____. *The Shape of Rage.* 37:4:55
Dolan, Carl. *Mythmakers of the American Dream.* 37:4:52
Dorset, Gerald. *O'Neill on Film.* 37:4:43
Draughtsman's Contract, The. 37:2:34
Dream Beside Me, The. 37:1:40
Drugs. 37:1:38
Eisenstein, Sergei. 37:4:27
Elements of Cinema, The. 37:1:48
Entertainment Machine, The. 37:1:57
Fanny and Alexander. 37:1:22
Farber, Stephen. *Daniel.* 37:3:32
Faulkner's MGM Screenplays. 37:1:46
Feldman, Seth. *Immoral Memories.* 37:4:27
Fell, John. *Languages of Revolt.* 37:4:38
Film Acting. 37:1:57
Film India. 37:1:58
Film: The Front Line. 37:4:45
Fitzcarraldo. 37:2:50
Jane Fonda: Heroine for Our Times. 37:4:28
French Film Books, 1981-1982. 37:1:61
Gandhi. 37:2:43
Geist, Kathe. Yasujiro Ozu: Notes on a Retrospective. 37:1:2
George Roy Hill. 37:4:57
German cinema. 37:4:48
Gitlin, Todd. *Fitzcarraldo.* 37:2:50
Glover, Sylvia & David Paul. The Difficulty of Moral Choice: Zanussi's *Contract* and *The Constant Factor.* 37:2:19
God Bless You, Buffalo Bill. 37:4:51
Godard, Jean-Luc. 37:3:13
Graffiti art. 37:4:3
Grant, J. Scott. *The Elements of Cinema.* 37:1:48
Guitry, Sacha. 37:1:37
Hanson, Stephen and Patricia King Hanson. *William A. Wellman.* 37:1:37
Henderson, Brian. *Between Flops: A Biography of Preston Sturges.* 37:1:31
Hess, John. *Third Cinema in the Third World.* 37:4:36
Hitchcock, Alfred. 37:1:34
Hogue, Peter. *Union City.* 37:2:43
Hollywood Musical Goes to War, The. 37:1:41
Identification of a Woman. 37:3:37
Immoral Memories. 37:4:27
Indecent Exposure. 37:1:56
Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust. 37:4:39
Jacobson, Brooke. *The Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man.* 37:3:57
Jaehne, Karen. *Balkan Cinema.* 37:1:40
_____. *Born in Flames.* 37:4:22
_____. Charles Ahearn: *Wild Style.* 37:4:2
_____. *The* Cineaste *Interviews.* 37:1:54
_____. Confessions of a Feminist Porn Programmer. 37:1:9

_____. *Kubrick.* 37:1:30
_____. *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence.* 37:3:43
_____. *Sacha Guitry.* 37:1:37
Jiri Menzel and the History of the Closely Watched Trains. 37:4:58
Johnson, William. *A Question of Silence.* 37:2:40
_____. *L'Argent.* 37:4:18
Kalinak, Kathryn. *Women and Film.* 37:4:40
Keller, Marjorie. *Murder Psalm.* 37:3:49
Kelly, William. *Identification of a Woman.* 37:3:37
Khanna, Satti. *Film India: The New Generation:* 37:1:58
Kubrick. 37:1:30
Kulberg, Raoul. *The Entertainment Machine.* 37:1:57
Languages of Revolt: Dada and Surrealist Literature and Film. 37:4:38
Look of Buster Keaton, The. 37:4:54
Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women. 37:1:47
Luchino Visconti. 37:4:59
Lulu in Hollywood. 37:1:53
MacBean, James Roy. *The New German Cinema.* 37:4:48
_____. *New German Film.* 37:4:48
_____. *Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema.* 37:4:43
_____. Watching the Third World Watchers: The Visual, the Verbal, the Personal and the Political in *Under Fire* and *The Year of Living Dangerously.* 37:3:1
MacDonald, Scott. Cinema 16: An Interview with Amos Vogel. 37:3:19
Macmillan Film Bibliography. 37:1:43
Malcolmson, Scott. *The Draughtsman's Contract.* 37:2:34
Man You Loved to Hate, The: Erich von Stroheim and Hollywood. 37:4:56
McCarroll, Lulu & Fabrice Ziolkowski. *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies.* 37:1:49
McClure, Arthur. *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War.* 37:1:41
Media Analysis Techniques. 37:1:53
Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence. 37:3:43
Michaud, Paul R. French Film Books, 1981–1982. 37:1:61
Midnight Movies. 37:1:54
Model. 37:2:2
Murder Psalm. 37:3:49
Musicals. 37:1:41
Musser, Charles. *The Man You Loved to Hate.* 37:4:56
Mythmakers of the American Dream. 37:4:52
Napoleon: Abel Gance's Classic Film. 37:4:35
Naremore, James. *Film Acting: The Techniques and History of Acting for Camera.* 37:1:57
Never Cry Wolf. 37:3:29
New German Cinema, The. 37:4:48
New German Film. 37:4:48
Nichols, Bill. *Studying Visual Communication.* 37:1:50
Nosowitz, Harvey. *Film: The Front Line.* 37:4:45
O'Brien, Tom. *Never Cry Wolf.* 37:3:29
On the Edge of History [Werner Schroeter]. 37:4:6
O'Neill on Film. 37:4:43
Ozu, Yasujiro: Notes on a Retrospective. 37:1:2
Passion for Films, A. 37:4:28
Paul, David & Sylvia Glover. The Difficulty of Moral Choice: Zanussi's *Contract* and *The Constant Factor.* 37:2:19
Persona and the Cinema of Interpretation. 37:2:10
Petrie, Graham. *Jiri Menzel and the History of the Closely Watched Trains.* 37:4:58
Polanski, Roman. 37:4:28
Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema. 37:4:43
Pont Du Nord. 37:2:60
Pornography. 37:1:9
Prénom: Carmen. 37:3:13
Purcell, J. M. *About John Ford.* 37:1:29
_____. *Joan Crawford: The Ultimate Star.* 37:4:30
_____. *Lulu in Hollywood.* 37:1:53
_____. *Star Myths.* 37:4:42
Quart, Barbara and Leonard. *Fanny and Alexander.* 37:1:22
Question of Silence, A. 37:2:40
Raskin, Jonah. *God Bless You, Buffalo Bill.* 37:4:51
Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies. 37:1:49
Rediscovering French Film. 37:4:32
Rentz, Neal. *Cary Grant.* 37:4:30
Reverse Angle: A Decade of American Film. 37:3:64
Richie, Donald. 37:3:2
Robinson, George. *Bad at the Bijou.* 37:1:55
Roman. 37:4:28
Rosenbaum, Jonathan. *American Directors.* 37:3:63
_____. *Cinema Stylists.* 37:4:33
Schroeter, Werner. 37:4:6
Seiter, Ellen. *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women.* 37:1:47
Shape of Rage, The: The Films of David Croenberg. 37:4:55
Sharrett Christopher. *Napoleon.* 37:4:35
_____. *The Look of Buster Keaton.* 37:4:54
Silkwood. 37:4:24
Smithereens. 37:2:54
Star Myths: Show-Business Biographies on Film. 37:4:42
Stewart, Garrett. *Death Watch.* 37:1:16
Still Life. 37:3:65
Studying Visual Communication: 37:1:50
Sturges, Preston. 37:1:31
Szporer, Mieczyslaw. Andrzej Wajda's Reign of Terror: *Danton's* Polish Ambiance. 37:2:27
Testament. 37:3:47
Third Cinema in the Third World. 37:4:36
Thomas, Paul. *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock.* 37:1:34
Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man, The. 37:3:57
Under Fire. 37:3:1
Union City. 37:2:43
Valenzuela, Karen. *Testament.* 37:3:47
Vogel, Amos. 37:3:19
Wajda, Andrzej. 37:2:27
Watching the Third World Watchers. 37:3:1
Wellman, William A. 37:1:37
Whiteley, Mary. *Jane Fonda.* 37:4:28
Wild Style. 37:4:2
Williams, Alan. *Rediscovering French Film.* 37:4:32
Wiseman's *Model* and the Documentary Project. 37:2:2
Women. 37:1:47
Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera. 37:4:40
Year of Living Dangerously, The. 37:3:1
Zavarzadeh, Mas'ud. *Smithereens.* 37:2:54
Ziolkowski, Fabrice. *Indecent Exposure: A True Story of Hollywood and Wall Street.* 37:1:56
_____. *Pont Du Nord.* 37:2:60
Ziolkowski, Fabrice & Lulu McCarroll. *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies.* 37:1:49
Zanussi. 37:2:19

PASSION AND DEFIANCE

Italian Film from 1942 to the Present

MIRA LIEHM

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VOLUME XXXVII, No. 4 Summer 1984

ARTICLES

Charles Ahearn: ***Wild Style*** KAREN JAEHNE 2
Self-expression in the South Bronx erupts into national consciouness as art: graffiti, rapping and breakdancing surface in Ahearn's "kinetic cubism."

On the Edge of History: The Radiant Spectacle of Werner Schroeter TIMOTHY CORRIGAN 6
Schroeter's cinema of operatic excess has remained relatively unknown, yet has been borrowed from by Fassbinder, Syberberg, and many other New German directors. At its heart lies a radical conception of a performative relation to history.

REVIEWS

L'Argent WILLIAM JOHNSON 18
In this strange tale of the spreading effects of dishonesty, Bresson is back at the peak of his stylistic form—but breaks from his usual austerity.

Born in Flames KAREN JAEHNE 22
Lizzi Borden's daring fantasy of a Women's Liberation Army in a post-revolutionary America carries current feminist concerns into the future with a playfully questioning disjunctive narrative.

Silkwood TOM DOHERTY 24
By refusing to try being ideologically correct, the Mike Nichols film achieves a complex portrait of the anti-nuke activist who takes her work personally, and may have died for it.

THE YEAR'S FILM BOOKS

Autobiographies and Biographies 27

Criticism 32

Director Studies 54

THE COVER: "Double Trouble" with some of their graffiti, from *Wild Style* (see page 2).

Editor's Notebook

MORE ON PERIODICALS

It appears that many of our readers would like to know more about the current state of American film periodicals, to supplement the brief notes given in the last issue. The *International Film Guide* lists only a few magazines, and new or unpublicized journals are hard to locate—or keep track of when they seem to have been defunct but, like *On Film* or *Velvet Light Trap*, revive. We would like to publish a survey of current periodicals, and thus ask editors to send us several recent sample issues; nominations from readers would also be welcome, telling us of publications they know of, since this invitation may not reach some journal editors.

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KAREN JAEHNE

Charles Ahearn: *Wild Style*

Part of the fascination with the "lively arts" of graffiti and rap music derives from the spontaneity of their expression. Another part of that fascination is that such art cannot be collected; it must be witnessed—catch as catch can. Newcomer Charles Ahearn's film *Wild Style* seems to revolve around those two spools of fascination like a tape-recorder unreeling. On the one hand, he documents the brighter side of life in the South Bronx with unprecedented gusto, using the characters who have actually developed the "wild style" which Ahearn explains succinctly as "kinetic cubism. It refers to pieces that are disjointed and then re-put together and added with a great deal of style. When a breakdancer comes off a dance he ends up in the same way. The graffiti letters balance with the same anti-equilibrium. It's like a pose. Graffiti artists like to say things like 'He makes those letters *dance.*'" On the other hand, Ahearn shows the commercialization of a movement and how these breakdancers, rappers, and graffiti artists have developed an aesthetic in the South Bronx that has advanced from self-expression to art.

Charles Ahearn is at home with their thinking. He has studied art himself, considers himself an artist, and his brother is a well-known sculptor also living in the South Bronx. However, the last three years spent making the film *Wild Style* have left Ahearn feeling less analytical or intellectual than people expect, when they recognize the acute intelligence that went into creating such a complex jumble of potentially chaotic art forms.

It all began on a stage shown in the film, an outdoor amphitheater called "The Valley," where kids held their performance or concerts or whatever they wanted to call them. Ahearn was introduced on the stage as someone who was going to produce a movie and—whammo! —sooner than he could say "Socko, biffo, box-office!" he was deluged by the rapping, breakdancing, spraycan-wielding hordes of the infamous South Bronx.

"I didn't want to make an exploitation picture of the evils and perils of that ghetto. Sure, there's a lot of violence, hold-ups, and all, but it never touched us. People knew exactly why we were there. (I live there!) What we were doing was really obvious, and they welcomed us in. But anybody can go down there and look around and pronounce on film 'poverty, brutality, desperation.' I built the film from the idea of the life there, from the characters I know, and so it was reversed from the usual process. I had my locations and my cast before I had a script."

Ahearn had made a previous picture about the martial arts called *The Deathly Art of Survival* in 1977, after which he became enamored of the graffiti artists all around him. In one scene in the film, Patty Astor, playing a journalist, drives into the ghetto, her car stalls, and she calls to a pack of street urchins, "I'm looking for the graffiti artist."

"We're *all* graffiti artists," answer some 30 three-foot-high kids, as they pitch in and push her stalled car off the street.

Ahearn finds the role of these "artists" within their own culture a great positive force. "Defacing public or private property" is a phrase that has never crossed his mind. "It's the most exciting thing happening in New York," he says, "and these kids are heroes at their schools, at home. People appreciate what they do. It's so different from when I was a kid and the class hero was a football player. (By the way, these guys play a mean game of basketball.)

"My twin brother and I did art work anyway," says Ahearn with a shrug. "But when I came to New York in 1973 to be an artist, I found the climate in New York very anti-painting. No self-respecting person painted at the time. They were into performance, film, video. It was only natural that I seized on film as a means to communicate—or entertain! Well, I see it *now* as a form of entertainment."

The power of Ahearn's film seems to derive from his refusal to document popular art as an accomplished *product* but rather his ability to become part of it and simulate the *process*

Film Quarterly

THE YEAR'S FILM BOOKS

SCHROETER'S SPECTACLE

WILD STYLE *SILKWOOD*

BRESSON'S *L'ARGENT*

SUMMER 1984

$2.75

WILD STYLE

that gives it life. Two brothers who call themselves "Double Trouble" are shown lounging on steps quasi-rehearsing their rap number and are again later shown in performance on stage. This incorporation of the lifestyle of people making up the South Bronx scene accomplishes what every anthropological filmmaker attempts to do.

Ahearn explains that in getting from lifestyle to ritual, "My approach was one of faith. The problems I had making the movie are clear in the range of reactions to the movie. Some people think that those people were just doing all these things like in a circus and I showed up with a camera. That's pretty naive. Others think I wrote all the raps and choreographed all the breakdancing, that I somehow invented an entire subculture. As a producer, I chose each character I approached with total faith in that character's ability to be interesting in and of itself. I didn't want to make that character into something else that would fit into an artificial or preconceived narrative. I neither glorified nor dramatized these people. I tried just to create a situation where they could perform. To go back to Norman Mailer, I had 'the faith of graffiti'."

For many people Norman Mailer's 1974 book *The Faith of Graffiti* was the "think piece" that gave cultural credibility to graffiti as art and introduced the aesthetics of graffiti to a public that was, at best, constantly complaining about "that mess on the subway." Ahearn points out, however, that Mailer saw it through the peculiar prism of modern art as a way to write one's name. He focused on the signature rather than the stylistics, and he saw its culmination, as if it were over in 1974. "Mailer speaks of the high watermark," says Ahearn, "without realizing that graffiti art comes in great waves."

Ahearn makes no reference to Mailer in the film, even in a cocktail-party sequence where chic art-collecting New Yorkers evolve into patrons of the street-smart art. Ahearn explains that the woman who commissions the hero to inscribe "graffiti art" in the form of the New York skyline on her wall is actually a famous collector who did just that. In spite of critical comments and/or accusations that it is a jarring and imposed narrative element, Ahearn is adamant about its authenticity.

"Everybody interested in the stuff has heard of Zorro, the man who did for New York what no park commission could," laughs Ahearn, "but who knows that he actually started in 1975 and kept this low personal profile, only to wind up with a very high-power gallery like Barbara Gladstone's behind him now? In fact, now he is working in an abandoned building. He doesn't produce like most artists for show or shows. He works when he wants. A lot of Europeans have become collectors and perhaps there's more interest there than here in graffiti as an art form."

In fact, without Channel 4 and Germany's famed ZDF, Ahearn's film would not have been possible. Funding from England was managed virtually with a phone call. The same sort of spontaneity could be attributed to the Germans, who usually suffer under a staid and stolid image. But the venturesome ZDF provided the seed money for the $250,000 budget. Did they ask to see a script?

"In August of 1980, when I was in Edinburgh showing my previous film at the festival there, I already had a video tape and a story board for what I wanted to do," answers Ahearn. "I'm not really much of a writer, so what I offered was images. I work much as a documentary film-maker does, approaching the subject for what it is, and get as much involvement as possible from that subject. Then I work from what inspires me. The storyboard was made up of color xeroxes. I would hang out in a club or on a block and decide that a certain scene expressed what I wanted to show. So I would have pictures of the characters and locations, which I structured without a written script." In fact, Ahearn says only two copies of a shooting script ever existed—one for him and one for the cinematographer.

"The movie expanded, of course, from my original conception. I realized that when we were editing—some 100,000 feet of 16mm film. And then the great nightmare of having to shoot the concert scene all over again, because the first time had not yielded up a good enough sound track. I had to weather a rough winter when we first began cutting the film, until four months later when we could restage that concert. All the music had to be redone. Our first rough cut, in the spring, was three hours with no sound. It was this huge, empty, meandering movie."

In order to cut the movie, Ahearn had to abandon a certain strategy of cubism. "Steve Brown, the editor, threw out some of my favorite material. The aesthetics of the picture had an art flavor. The aesthetic of the DJ back-spinning a record relates to a kind of cubist idea of cutting up and rearranging the original. A lot of scenes I had arranged to music would have shown up visually like a record you're back-spinning, so that they would run forward, backward and recreate in a visual medium what is going on with the rap artists and the breakdancers. I wanted to spin the images on themselves."

Ahearn also wanted to incorporate a logically associated art form: animation. Some dream sequences were to have been animated, but the budget did not permit. The comic-book effect of the film's style makes the animation virtually conspicuous by its omission. Certainly the Zap Comix crowd could be considered the forebears of Zorro.

Although Ahearn carefully avoids any sense of an homage to the precursors of graffiti artists, he does admit to having staged one sequence "to recreate that feeling of rival gangs facing off, like in *West Side Story*." Two rap gangs, the Colt Crush and the Fantastic, "rap-crews" who have been vying for supremacy in their field, face each other in a rap performance that shows the potential violence depicted in the *West Side Story* gangs can be sublimated.

The love story between the hero and his lady is often assumed to have been created by Ahearn as another *West Side Story* echo. In fact, "that was already happening," says Ahearn with the air of betraying secrets to *People* magazine. "When I first began scripting the story I had heard of 'Pink.' She was a woman who was head of a graffiti gang. What she wanted, apparently, was to meet Lee, whom I knew from years earlier and who had already been brought into my story, at least as a character. He had not agreed to act in it. He is like an invisible man and had always worked in total anonymity. So weeks after I had heard of her, she met Lee, strangely enough, at an art show, and the two of them fell deeply in love. They started this relationship that rivals the great love stories of kings

"Lady Pink" Fabara in WILD STYLE

and queens, stars and starlets. In the Manhattan underground the romance is very famous! Here is this woman who is very attractive and yet very tough. She goes into the subway with her own crew and paints, and here is Lee, who is a legend and like a Marlon Brando figure. No one could ever get a glimpse of him, and suddenly he is in a romance that gets talked about. They were not public. But people talked."

Ahearn was concerned about giving Pink equal time. Not out of a feminist concern, but rather as a loyalty to the truth of what existed, he realized that she had to play herself. "She was already someone. We didn't make her into a graffiti champ. She was already the big time and a figure of interest. People who think I just pasted that on just didn't ask the right questions."

One reason for doubting the existence of Pink in the world of graffiti art is the element of danger that goes with the job. Getting into the train yards at night is no easy task, and "the third rail" represents no small risk. It is a high-voltage electricity-bearing rail that powers the trains. "There have been severe accidents," says Ahearn, "like spray cans getting ignited and blowing up on people. An equally large danger exists in getting beaten up by a rival group. I think danger is not the word for it; it's adventure. It's like a military foray. Every move is planned out. Someone takes a particular post, another guy is sent out as a runner, someone stays back to keep sure that it's clear. In half an hour we'll be at the third post, and then we'll proceed to the fourth track at a certain signal. If the signal doesn't come, then there's a fall-back position. In other words, the whole thing is planned like a military operation."

Ahearn chose to shoot on location in the subway yards and had to get permission to do so, perhaps the first time anyone had ever *asked* to go in there to do what they had been doing for a decade. Ahearn's stories of New York City's involvement in the film, from the teamsters' harrassment to a straight pay-off, indicate his own stature. "You get one movie, I'm told," laughs Ahearn, "before they really come after you. I shot the whole thing for only $70,000. I don't know where I was supposed to come up with enough bread for the teamsters and half of City Hall. We got no police protection. Once they figured out we were in the South Bronx, they were nowhere to be found. Their attitude was 'Good Luck.' Actually, it probably worked in our favor that they didn't come. They would have set off a different set of vibes."

The vibes captured by Ahearn for *Wild Style* are full of extemporaneous rhymes in polyrhythms. Their inventors have names like Grandmaster Flash, Chief Rocker Busy Bee and the Furious Five, who collectively challenge the reputation held by the South Bronx for being the world's most dangerous ghetto. The only danger they seem to pose in *Wild Style* is captured in one beautiful sequence where Lee "Zorro" is frustrated with a mural he is painting and turns from the wall, walking toward the river. From the right side of the screen, the bare, unpainted surface on the side of a barge begins to fill up the screen—like a challenge, waiting to be painted.

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TIMOTHY CORRIGAN

On the Edge of History:
THE RADIANT SPECTACLE OF WERNER SCHROETER

> *Ought we not to remind ourselves—we who believe ourselves bound to finitude which belongs only to us, and which opens up the truth of the world to us by means of our cognition—ought we not to remind ourselves that we are bound to the back of a tiger?*
>
> —MICHEL FOUCAULT

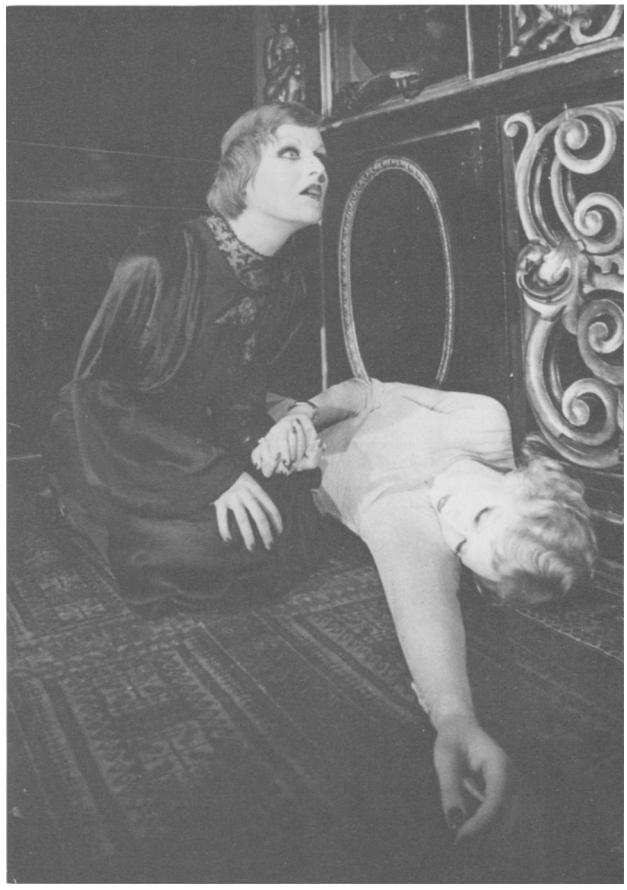
Inspiring father and prodigal son, Werner Schroeter is the unresolved paradox at the heart of the New German Cinema. While one of the defining marks of that celebrated new wave from Germany has been the coherency with which its family of film-makers has addressed movie markets at home and abroad, Schroeter has drifted (passionately, perversely, and insouciantly) in and out of that community of *Wünderkinder* as they developed in the last twenty years into adult entrepreneurs. Indeed, what has united these new German film-makers through the years has been, perhaps above all else, an engagement with the cultural and cinematic history that contextualizes them. Anchored in the specter of a Nazi past and a postwar colonization by America and Hollywood, these films—from Wenders's nostalgic broodings about the United States to Schlöndorff's political parables about fascism through the ages—have consistently aimed at re-examining the meaning of history for themselves, their characters, and their audiences. Yet to describe Schroeter's films as part of the same family history would seem, especially to viewers acquainted with the earlier films, the most procrustean of academic exercises. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Schroeter and his films have usually appeared to eschew the reality of those historical events which have anchored Fassbinder's Maria Braun, Schlöndorff's Oskar, Wenders's Tom Ripley, or Kluge's Roswitha. Instead, Schroeter's operatic characters have inhabited a kind of allegorical twilight where the excessively theatrical settings and elliptical narratives have made his work look more like experimental dreams of mythical times than like pictures of a known world. His recurrent themes of passionate love, erotic death, and *Leidenschaft* (commitment beyond restraints) have focused his films on exaggerated sufferings and stylized beauties ("the beauty of pain" says one of his characters) whose very definition seems to contradict most logics of history or the coherency of a social viewpoint.

Unlike the work of experimental film-makers whose films his early cinema misleadingly resembles, however, Schroeter's films are narratives: the life of a renowned opera singer who battles for expression within a patriarchal order (*The Death of Maria Malibran*) or the tale of three women isolated in a California desert where they attempt to create an emotionally intense commune free of male interference (*Willow Springs*). Yet the presentations of these narrative histories then disjoin and overlap such a variety of perspectives and materials that most viewers find themselves either confused or fascinated by the presiding unreality of the events. Operatic sound tracks merge with pop tunes; characters strike long and outlandish campy poses in excessively theatrical costumes and make-up; extended silences and poetic overstatements ("life is very precious, even right now") describe the dialogue; and the stories themselves often seem random pastiches that shift chaotically not only in time but in subject. If *Maria Malibran* focuses on an historical topic and personality, therefore, the historical contours of that topic become largely subverted in the more abstract question of a female creative will, described again and again through close-ups of various combinations of three women set against black backdrops. Similarly, if *Willow Springs* clearly foreshadows Altman's *Three Women,* the remarkable resemblance of storylines is mostly superficial, since Schroe-

ter's comparatively fragmented film moves the drama, for the most part, out of the desert reality and into the closed, mirrored, and artificial spaces of the house in which this psychic drama is bared and stripped of any distracting realism.

Schroeter's career can, in fact, be divided into two narrative phases. Until the 1978 production of *The Kingdom of Naples,* his films seemed exiled to the underground tradition of low-budget cinema, funded by television (specifically the artsy ZDF station); after 1978, though, Schroeter made a conscious effort to translate those original themes onto a more commercial and accessible level, into what he has called the more "humane" form of traditional narrative patterning. Yet he insists that the move from the more private and more difficult experiments to the more realistic and more public narratives is mostly one of style, not vision, aimed at finding a larger audience, and that the "hyper realism" of the recent films simply locates the psychodramas of the first films in the historical forms through which they are best communicated. As a paradox and a problem, Schroeter and his film have consequently remained, at base, consistent: if he shares a modernist's critical concern with history and film narrative (Godard, Oshima, etc.), his films have detoured that concern through opera, Romantic mysticism, and a gay sensibility through which camp and kitsch become the critical vehicles for self-conscious emotion.

The irony of this practice and Schroeter's place within contemporary German cinema is that he is one of its singularly most influential film-makers. Moving between theater, opera, and film, he has been a major presence within the general aesthetic climate of Western Europe throughout the sixties and seventies. He has acted in Fassbinder's *Beware of a Holy Whore;* relentlessly pursued a now legendary obsession with Maria Callas; and in Syberberg's *Ludwig,* a narrator describes him as one of the truly revolutionary artists of our age. Seemingly always at the center of controversy, he and Rosa von Praunheim opened a loud, public, and important quarrel about a homosexual perspective in the cinema, but despite his growing international status he has been conspicuously ignored by



THE DEATH OF MARIA MALIBRAN

the New York Film Festival (and hence American distributors). His personal behavior has, moreover, preceded and confirmed the flamboyant and eccentric flavor of his films. Whether at Berkeley or the Cinémathèque Française (where Henri Langlois hailed him in 1970), Schroeter and the leathered entourage that follows him have descended in the theatrically outrageous fashion of his films. And his unusually intimate rapport with his actors, matching personalities with roles, has become as celebrated as the passionate relationships of his characters: the locations for his films (such as Naples or Sicily) become, apparently, a kind of home where he closely involves the community and his troupe in decisions about shooting and dialogue; his actors, most notably the striking Magdalena Montezuma and later Antonio Orlando, have followed Schroeter from film to film as the centers for his radically private families on and off the set.

With the 1978 release of *The Kingdom of Naples,* however, Fassbinder went public with this eccentric paradox and proclaimed, in a crucial article, that the best kept secret of the New German Cinema was Werner Schroeter:

"Germany has not only three or five or ten directors to offer," he says; "Germany has one who has certainly been absent." According to Fassbinder, there are few film-makers who "had chances to make films who didn't borrow from Schroeter," including Daniel Schmid and Ulrike Ottinger, and many recent student films "are fundamentally experiments on Schroeter." While Fassbinder readily admits his own debt (best illustrated perhaps in closet dramas like *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* or *Querelle,* which Schroeter at one time was supposed to direct), the most famous example of Schroeter's influence is Syberberg, whom Fassbinder calls a "merchant in plagiarism," "an extremely capable Schroeter imitator, who while Schroeter awaited recognition competently marketed what he took from Schroeter." Likewise, Herzog has frequently acknowledged the importance of Schroeter's films to his work, and a summary instance of the Schroeter paradox is doubtless the fact that most viewers might know his name and style only through the opera sequence that opens Herzog's blandly commercial *Fitzcarraldo.* Indeed, the separate fates that awaited Herzog and Schroeter after they both shocked audiences at the 1970 Cannes Festival (with *Even Dwarfs Started Small* and *Eika Katappa*) indicate, in Fassbinder's words, how, with singular injustice, Schroeter's films "acquired that very convenient underground label, which in a twinkling has made them into admittedly beautiful but exotic plants, flowering so far away that one basically couldn't deal with them."[1]

Even after *Palermo or Wolfsburg* won the prestigious Golden Bear at the 1980 Berlin Film Festival, Schroeter and his films have remained barely on the visible fringes of the cinematic family and historical movement which he, in many ways, helped to deliver. Or, to put this in broader terms: if a defining characteristic of many contemporary German directors has been their sensitivity and adjustment to their historical situation as film-makers, Schroeter would seem to have chosen another, a different, course in time; and what has made this course so distinctive and central to the project of the New German Cinema is that its starting point and constant focus has been precisely the individual's ability to live radically on history's edges. For Schroeter and his films, history has become not so much a surrounding and determining predicament where, in a Marxist manner, the world and events are privileged so that they structure an individual's sense of self. Rather, for him history becomes a recurring moment, where time and place are an almost arbitrary stage on which the individual releases emotion, where one chooses to enter history from outside in order to perform oneself as a spectacle of time. Three women creating themselves out of a desert which stands in stark contrast to their personal passions, a young man crossing the geographical, temporal, and social bar between Palermo, Italy and Wolfsburg, Germany, a film-maker whose powerful perspective has mapped an aesthetic territory (for two generations of German directors) which he has willfully moved in and out of: these are figures describing Schroeter's history as the stage awaiting the individual's emotional entry from its wings.

The heart of the Schroeter paradox is then this radical conception of a performative relation to history. For, it is here that one can pinpoint two ideas that focus both the difficulty and importance of Schroeter's films: namely, the notion of an excess lost in a filmic performance and that of the cinematic subject made by this performance. The second of these has of course received a great deal of critical scrutiny lately, mainly because the Lacanian model of the subject, appropriated by Metz for the cinema, has proved at once to offer little understanding of sexual difference as performed by the cinema and to idealize the different positionings of the spectator/subject through the course of his-

PALERMO OR WOLFSBURG

tory. The first, however, is both more problematic and more central: for, whereas the critique of the cinematic subject has had the advantage of a relatively large vocabulary and literature, the idea and representation of excess (psychoanalytic, cinematic, historical, or otherwise) stumbles precisely on the rock of formulation or articulation. In a sense crucial to Schroeter's aesthetic, a filmic excess—the violent murders that erupt across the narrative, the inexpressible emotions, the inordinately long takes, the multiple reflections within the frame that dizzy the perspective—becomes itself the fulcrum for that critique of the cinematic subject, becomes itself what dramatically and intentionally does not fit that desiring machine of filmic representation; and, as such, its meaning and force are precisely the associative or negative definitions on which it relies: lack, more than, overdetermination, outside, or, in a metaphor from Schroeter's *General Rehearsal,* that homeless place of the passionate soul.

Despite the problem of terminology and despite its Romantic connotations, excess as a filmic strategy in Schroeter's cinema is therefore more than a mystification, and is instead a critical attempt to locate a textual subject/spectator or textual place for the viewer which would be the very contrary of that subject/spectator as it has been discussed in recent years (in terms of the specific way that dominant or classical cinema positions its audience). Rather than an inscription of the subject as a symbolic and historical production, Schroeter's cinema works, in short, to make a place for the spectator which would remain a place (unlike the displacement of strictly experimental film) but a place outside the confines of history and the strictures of the historical subject, a place where history is redefined finally by the excess and possibilities which escape it, that place of undefined potential from which contemporary German cinema has found its acute perspective on history.

In a most obvious and conventional way, this radical notion of the subject's relation to history is best recognized in a recent Schroeter film like *Kingdom of Naples* (1978). Through its use of fairly traditional narrative formulas and its explicit dramatization of history as a succession of large purple dates on the screen, *Kingdom of Naples* pinpoints an overt argument about history through a biographical and surprisingly naturalistic account of the Pagano family living in Naples between 1943 and 1972, an account which

KINGDOM OF NAPLES

EIKKA KATAPPA

the film furthermore places quite visibly in the larger context of Italian history (the resistance, the economic boom, etc.). A mimicking of family chronicles like Bertolucci's *1900,* the historical realism in this film is, however, repeatedly undercut by the inflated melodrama of exaggerated emotional response and the constructed settings of the stagy courtyard surrounded by apartments. Similarly, the direction and movement of this family or internal history becomes markedly different from what one would expect from a more neorealist or Marxist film, since in *Kingdom of Naples* the relation of private history to public history develops as a kind of dance of death in which the private life moves primarily to escape entirely the public history, to stop it and abolish it at its source. The characters struggle relentlessly to escape their historical condition of poverty and for each that escape can mean only death. Apartments open onto nothing but the sea; and, like the swelled red curtain in the film that reveals only a wall, only in their deaths are the characters able to affirm their lives and to color the moments of their personal histories, those moments of passionate excess which public history cannot accommodate or adequately express.

Significantly, in this drama of histories, Schroeter's female characters are the figures who resist history most effectively, quite literally freezing the passage of time into a statically wearied and timelessly wrinkled expression of mortality. Equally significant, moreover, this film of two histories takes place in Naples and begins about 1945: the country and time of cinema's most famous historical realism and the city which, in nineteenth-century opera and literature, became a celebrated location where history was ironically debunked and overturned, the place where historical "codes, genres, figures were converted into masks, unsettled, uncovered."[2] With a cinematic form that at least approaches historical realism and through the formal and narrative play between two kinds of history, in brief, *Kingdom of Naples* enacts a subtle and complex critique of historical reality as such or, more precisely, a critique of the classical representation of historical reality as it has traditionally been constructed for its film audiences. In this critique, *Kingdom of Naples* describes and focuses most crucially on an historical "instant," a temporal period extended across three decades as a rite of passage, when subjective history and public history cross not as an Althusserian articulation but as a seam between the relatively boundless capacity of individual need and the restriction of historical possibility, the point where a carnivalesque indeterminacy borders the representation of official history. As a sort of summary episode, this potential moment on the edge of history crystallizes in the film when Rosaria is about to give birth to her first child: to the men waiting below, she passes before the window hailing this extended moment of pure potential as a victory over the public history and world that awaits her child: "It isn't born yet!"

Almost needless to say, this passage into history which *Kingdom of Naples* dramatizes so overtly is the one which informs the structure of many other Schroeter films where it appears as a more oblique and personal ritual. *Willow Springs* is ostensibly the story of three women secluded in the Mojave Desert, but here realistic distinctions quickly give way to a psycho-aesthetic drama in which it becomes increasingly difficult to tell whether the drama concerns three versions of one woman or three different women: Magdalena, Ilse, and Christine. Both the exterior desert and the interior rooms glow with a surreal light and color that overwhelm the naturalistic setting. Characters drift and speak like ghosts trapped in an isolated and haunted house, and the violence that frames the narrative (the rape of Magdalena at the beginning and her shooting of the others at the end) becomes the poles in a slow movement from seclusion in a dream outward to where desires are actualized.

In *The Death of Maria Malibran* Schroeter likewise uses a tripartite focus on three women to tell the tale of the famous prima donna who supposedly sang herself to death in 1836. In a juxtaposition typical of Schroeter, Maria Callas and Janis Joplin both figure in the film (the voice of one and a grotesque impersonation of the other), and the long close-ups of various combinations of the three women describe a kind of poetic interaction of life, death, and passionate commitment. That the central of the three sections, "Frederico Garcia," concerns Malibran's father indicates, in Schroeter's oblique manner, that the singer's death in a last and excessive moment of song arrives only as she moves through and into a patriarchal history. Indeed, in each of these films, what is often a bit difficult to make out but is regularly indexed in the pastiche of cultural codes and historical references is again that curious insistence on history (in its restrictive violence, of the father, as a stage) as a way of fixing and determining the individual within time itself. As in *Kingdom of Naples,* what is at stake in all these films is that seam where the individual subject encounters a world outside as history, where an historical order, in short, appropriates all that unbounded passion within the individual and so begins to form the memory of that individual according to the language of narrative.

THE DEATH OF MARIA MALIBRAN

Here the passage into history marks specifically the formation of a symbolic or social self, but this new self is achieved in these films only with the conditional death of a more vital imaginary self. That figurative instant where one's personal story adapts the contours of History is where the self is formed as memory, where the self is born into a determining memory; yet, for Schroeter, this birth of memory necessarily signifies the death of a kind of presence. Entering History is always a nostalgic farewell such as Carla's "symbolic gesture of farewell" in *Bomber Pilot;* entering History is always an exchange whose economics barter death as Rose is bartered to an American soldier in *Kingdom of Naples* (the prelude to her actual death). In Serge Daney's words, in Schroeter's films "There is the time of History and the time of biography, and between the two sometimes nothing."[3]

In one important sense then, history in Schroeter's films manifests itself primarily as a material and fabricated spectacle in which the individual must adopt a singular and limiting role, as a spatialization of time that is ultimately a spectacle of death. For Schroeter, history becomes quintessentially what Stephen Heath has described as a memory—spectacle whose very nature is to create the subject as a contextualized figure of the past, reified and reduced; the articulation of the individual into historical time is perforce a swan's song sung against a rigidly framed, dark backdrop. As an ultimate performance, Schroeter's characters act again and again the enunciation of memory and death, and the theatricality of the gestures and narrative actions mark explicitly the crossing of the bar that separates the passionate excess of life and the mnemonic confines that describe the death of that excess. In *General Rehearsal* (a film set in the context of the World Theater Festival at Nancy and in which Schroeter creates a collage of festival performances, interspersed with conversations featuring him and others), a split screen divides an old man, apparently in a partially soundproof booth, and a young man who questions him about love and death; when the young man asks him if he is afraid of death, the old man strains to hear the question and responds appropriately, "The theater? The theater?" Later, this theatrical status of memory and the past elusively recurs when a series of boys are interviewed by an offscreen voice: repeatedly, they are asked "What do you think of your parents? What do you think of the Festival?"

Of Schroeter's earlier films, however, it is the 1970 *Bomber Pilot* which perhaps best delineates this narrative pattern within which the individual subject can engage history only as the memory-spectacle of death. For this film is expressly about the performance of the past as a spectacle of the present, which, as an implicit rehearsal of the recent history of contemporary German cinema, must change its contexts from Nazi Germany to capitalistic America (and then a postwar American Germany)[4]: as one of the women in the film puts it, "Finally we decided to live up to our past and put on a cabaret for the American officers." Throughout the film, from the opening shots of the three women saluting and dancing partially nude before a Nazi flag until the recreation (at the conclusion) of the same salute, it is clear that the past pervades the future here as a recovery in the present tense of the narrator Magdalena. Each of the three women in this film, in fact, represents a historical tense: Carla, the past; Mascha, the future; and Magdalena, the present. While the film develops according to the interaction of these three temporal figures, it ends appropriately when Mascha truly enters the future and history itself as the pregnant but crippled lover of an American bomber pilot. Once again, the past dies, in the form of the crippled Mascha, as it enters the historical future in the form of the bomber pilot's child.

In *Bomber Pilot,* history thus again finds its course and expression as a performance and specifically a performance based in desire: the continual staging of the three women to the sound of applause and in various theatrical forms of striptease indicates quite clearly that this is not only a performance *of* a subject but one in which the voyeuristic demands of desire direct the illusory and holistic emplacement of that memory-spectacle *for* the spectator. Seen in terms of the individual subject, in short, the ruptures in history are dramatized in *Bomber Pilot* as an erotic spectacle which creates an entirely illusory continuity such as the opening sequence makes apparent when the sound track overlaps and quickly moves between *The Blue Danube,* crowds cheering, an operatic score, and the out-of-sync screams of the women. Here, like the individual character's confrontation with history in *Kingdom of Naples,* between the screams of historical discontinuity and excess and the continuity of song and narrative lies only the symbolic and metonymic productions of a subject desiring to recover a past. As the two-part structural repetition of the film makes clear (fascism being reproduced as two historical movements), for Schroeter it is not so much the movement of history according to its productions but the repeated moments of those productions themselves that focus the nature of history as an enunciation. Here, moreover, Schroeter suggests his streamlined definitions of fascism as a temporal fixing of personal emotions, the Nazis being only the most notorious example of how a people's passions can be exploited in the name of History.

In each of these films, history for Schroeter's characters is not an independently propelled series of chronological events but rather a memory through which desire articulates itself *mortally* on the world, where history is always between quotation marks, indicating its remove and its nature as a productive instance. Put in terms of a recurrent metaphor in Schroeter's films, this meeting between the individual and time can be described spatially this way: as a window onto historical reality which invariably reflects back on the perceiving subject just as a mirror describes the plastic space where the subject fashions a temporal image of him or herself. In one exemplary shot in *Willow Springs,* for instance, Christine Kaufman sits on the left side of the frame with her back to a window which, because of the shadows and the dirt, appears like a mirror; Magda-

BOMBER PILOT

lena Montezuma approaches in the reflection, while the camera zooms slowly in on the reflecting window to reveal, at the last moment, that the image of Magdalena does not approach Christine as a reflection but from the world outside and behind Christine. Just as Magdalena in this film represents what Christine calls "the beauty of pain," here her image plays confusedly on a representational edge that merges the reality of the figure and the image of that figure, that concomitantly reveals an intimacy of recognition and a blindness connected with distance. Like the performance of history itself, this mirror as window which contains Magdalena dramatizes the two sides of that productive space which inscribes the historical subject in both its beauty and its pain as a single moment, where an external history and a perceiving subject become momentarily and ecstatically lost in each other.

Another metaphor with which to focus this historical moment in Schroeter's films as a specifically temporal action is that of the urban pastoral,[5] a notion that recalls both that camp tradition of which Schroeter is obviously a part and the troublesome Romantic tradition of Rousseauistic speech which Schroeter seems, for better or worse, to flirt with. Textually, the pastoral half of this expression is signalled frequently in Schroeter's films by various versions of the bucolic interlude which, for instance, occurs in *The Death of Maria Malibran* when a nude woman steps lyrically through a forest setting, almost as a narrative pause. Related to other images and narrative stops in the films (such as the androgynous bodies and the composed statuesque faces) these are images and moments of visual or musical excess, unrelated to any narrative logic or at least theatrically reminiscent of something like a lost innocence or purity. As a pastoral, this is a more or less ahistorical or prehistorical moment which alternates with the tug of history like the boy in *Willow Springs* who, coming to the desert retreat from Los Angeles, sighs, "Back and forth, back and forth, I like the city but I like the country better."

These pastoral signifiers are not isolated, however, and their importance to Schroeter's vision of history lies entirely in the fact that they are ironically bracketed in the quotation marks of their own theatricality or the exaggerated materiality of their production. If this pastoral instant appears as a kind of ahistorical, preconscious state, associated with the extreme passion at the center of the individual's story, its reality is always a nostalgic potential for Schroeter, defined by the urban world of history that surrounds it (as one moves, for instance, from the pastoral Palermo to the urban Wolfsburg), defined by the symbolic production into which this imaginary of the pastoral must project itself in order to express itself at all. This urban pastoral describes, in other words, that moment of imaginary excess when the subject dies into history, into representation, like a Wagnerian heroine, like Wilde's Salome, and, if the memory continually and metonymically seeks to reproduce that pastoral purity, for Schroeter this moment is forever retrievable only as an urban pastoral, a material image like the aria on a scratched record that marks the excess of passion as a moment lost. The compliment to Rosaria's victorious announcement that her child has not yet been born is accordingly Magdalena's confrontation with Christine in *Willow Springs:* immediately after the boy's wistful description of his vacillation between an urban and pastoral climate, Magdalena tears

BLACK ANGEL

WILLOW SPRINGS

a plastic doll's head away from Christine and, while staring at it, remarks that "the only person I ever loved was the child that died within me."

That women or the representation of women so consistently figure at the center of this urban pastoral is, however, more than the presentation of a maternal image fostering that lost object on the edge of history. Rather, women play such an important role in Schroeter's films not only because of their status for him as a passionate expression rebelling against a patriarchal history but, equally important, because as objects of representation they focus most dramatically the representational repression of the cinema. Engaging history as a memory-spectacle in the process of forming itself, Schroeter's films necessarily turn, like other modernist films, specifically to the disguised crisis in the cinematic spectacle itself because it is here that a narrative structure acts out most insidiously the performance of memory as the production of memory and here that the presence of the female body resists most excessively its material emplacement on the edge of this performance.[6]

Classical narrative film is always in this sense fetishized history—*Young Mr. Lincoln* being only the most infamous example. As memories, such films retrieve that lost time, that pastoral instant as one story or one time that displaces the crisis of the subject entering history from the productive center of the representation to the already produced and continuous reality of narrative fiction. Like the woman in *Bomber Pilot* who notes that "memories interposed themselves between us and our future," the continual present tense of film becomes the illusory suppression of the crisis of history that occurs when the pastoral subject enters that history as a symbolic production.

Exposing this making of history as it is disguised by the filmic text—or, more in Schroeter's spirit, pinpointing it as a crisis of the subject/spectator—therefore becomes a representational strategy that would counter film's narrative illusion at its perceptual center, where a pastoral body engenders a fetishized time scheme. For Schroeter, however, this means not so much (or at least not alone) a Godardian deconstruction of the mechanisms of cinema's temporal illusions. Instead, Schroeter's strategy for revealing the productive representation of history is primarily and usually to keep intact the fetishizing action of narrative film but to foreground continually its constructive or theatrical nature, so that that pastoral instant of excess, with all its emotional and preconscious force, remains emotionally and explicitly displayed at the very moment that it enacts its metonymic and theatrical displacements. Informing the entirety of his films, this Janus-faced aesthetic appears, for instance, in Schroeter's use of operatic scores which move with their traditional emotional force yet which simultaneously mark their distance as obvious phonographic recordings from another time and place. In *Willow Springs,* Magdalena plays an aria from an Italian opera on a record player and then stares directly into the camera; the next shot shows Ilse staring off wistfully while a tear rolls down her cheek, and the sequence closes with a cut to a tacky Cupid poster which recuperates the operatic emotion in its most campy materiality. Highlighting the materiality of the composition here and throughout his films, Schroeter thus draws the spectator into a visual ceremony which is the very making of the spectacle.[7]

This representational action is no doubt most noticeable in the elaborate and histrionic display of the female pose in Schroeter's films (often shown in a single shot as the separate symbolic divisions of one woman). But, related more specifically to narrative illusion, this strategy operates most significantly as a holding in place of film's

illusion of continuity or progression while it simultaneously reveals this illusion as a recurring return, as a point of origin whose aura proceeds from its material repetition. Unlike more strictly experimental films, Schroeter's films do not fully subvert narrative time but instead repeatedly rehearse and recall its formation as a productive instant: as a material emplacement of the subject into historical time that necessarily entails the loss of an excess reality, a death in a literal sense. Put specifically in terms of the filmic text, Schroeter's films are continually recreating themselves as narrative time and spectacles of memory; and, as the subject of that spectacle, the spectator is thus placed repeatedly on that mortal edge of history, in that pastoral instant which enters excessively into the camp climate of an urban perspective.

Image-repetition is the key tactic here since it cuts both ways as a temporal model. As Freud first pointed out, repetition serves on one hand to stabilize the subject-ego as it binds that subject to the cohesive narrative of memory's *re*collection. In this sense, repetition channels and contains the individual, as in a classical narrative film where the repetition of shots, figures, and images places the spectator solidly in a narrative pattern based on *re*cognition. The other side of that repetition, which is so distinctively Schroeter's focus, is what Lacan calls "the more radical diversity constituted by repetition itself,"[8] a diversity which marks the dispersal of unity and the disbanding of a historical identity. From this perspective, repetition functions as "an absence of direction, a failure of coherence: the return to the same in order to abolish the difficult time of desire, it produces in that very moment the resurgence of inescapable difference. . . . Its edge, its final horizon is thus death, the ultimate collapse of same and different, pure totality and indifference."[9] While the first effect of repetition is thus to inscribe the subject-spectator into a narrative coherence, this second use of repetition suggests a project clearly at odds with the first in Schroeter's films: thematically, this second dimension correlates with that pastoral instant or temporal seclusion into which his characters retreat; figurally it is the three women that tend to divide and merge at the center of his

WILLOW SPRINGS

film, often reappearing in film after film; and stylistically it is a continual return to the same or similar image, a return that invariably threatens to undermine narrative suspense with a kind of boredom, indifference.

This repetition of images becomes in this way a kind of stasis, a non-narrative moment that actually stops the fetishized disguise of film's movement in an instant of death at work. Present in innumerable Schroeter films, this use of image-repetition to transform historical time into an instant of stasis appears most dramatically in *The Death of Maria Malibran,* a film which becomes an unsettling documentary of faces set graphically against dark or entirely black backgrounds: in this film, not only do these facial poses textually crystallize the expressive look itself as a deathly pale brilliance, a kind of death mask, born on the edge of darkness, but the repetition of these poses moreover tends to pulls disturbingly against a narrative progression and to settle the movement of the film's montage in the stasis of these repeated shots. Within the action of narrative and historical time, in short, the filmic text literally counters its continuity with the virtual stasis of its recurrent tableaux, tableaux which significantly strain with the excess of the theatrical postures, tableaux which *General Rehearsal* metaphorically summarizes when a couple rehearse—again and again throughout the film—a passionate embrace, a lethargic falling apart, and a return to the embrace.

What is most distinctively and disturbingly Schroeter here is of course not so much his subversion of traditional narrative structures, but rather the tense and fragile balance which

his films establish on the very edge of these narrative and historical structures. In this case, for example, image-repetition as the foundation of narrative works both ways across its temporal model and both ways simultaneously: it at once secures a narrative history for the subject-spectator and returns that spectator to the material origin of narrative history by stopping narrative action in a stasis of visual excess or indeterminacy (suggested in one way by the misdirected eyeline matches of the frozen faces). Of the many examples of this repeated point along the edge of narrative history, however, the most descriptive may be the story of the boy, Michael, in *Willow Springs*. Retreating from Los Angeles to the sanctuary of the three women, this boy repeatedly recites a partial narrative about his desire to flee to a pastoral Hawaii, the repetition of the tale at once calling attention to its own production, defining him as a character, and representing his retardation in the static reality of Willow Springs. In terms of this narrative refrain, the present tense in which he lives at Willow Springs becomes a nostalgic desire for a pastoral future, a self-enclosed and circular memory of his future hopes. Yet, when he attempts to leave and to enter an actual narrative history, to complete his past in a real future, this narrative memory must die the death (here the literal death of the boy gunned down by Magdalena) that comes with engaging history. Michael's story in *Willow Springs* thus becomes the narrative version of the plastic replica of the child that died within Magdalena and the inevitable tragedy that springs from Rosaria's pregnancy: a material image subsisting on nostalgia, his narrative miscarries at the very moment of its birth.

For Schroeter, therefore, the starting point and consistent focus of his fragile and disjointed narratives are not so much the structures of history (as it is to some extent for more notable followers like Syberberg) but instead the excess that official or symbolic history leaves behind: for Schroeter, facing history becomes largely and ironically a flamboyantly tragic effacement, like that of his Prometheus acting a scene on a burning roof, like the stained glass phoenix in *General Rehearsal* whose luminosity overwhelms the figuration. Indeed, this relation to history accounts to a large extent for the marginal place Schroeter has consistently maintained in the recent history of contemporary German cinema: a place emblematic of the original potential of this cinema, lost by other directors through their metaphoric deaths at the hands of history (as in Wenders's *State of Things*) or through more tragically real deaths like Fassbinder's. With some tragic irony, moreover, Schroeter has not only been figuratively exiled from this history but recently quite literally exiled when a scandal erupted over his 1979 efforts to produce *Salome* for the stage. Driven to Paris by a newspaper campaign that depicted Schroeter in the anti-Semitic caricatures of the Nazis (e.g., as a rat) Schroeter made there *General Rehearsal,* perhaps his most autobiographically direct work and one which refers explicitly to this personal incident of historical and cultural violence. In an almost playfully contrary response to this historical pressure, however, Schroeter asks himself within *General Rehearsal* what the theme of the film is. As the question hangs fire, the film cuts to a series of close-ups of individuals whose isolated expressions stand by themselves as the passionate focus of Schroeter's art, outside and in excess of both a contextual history and the narrative logic of the question itself.

If, therefore, Schroeter's relation to the history of contemporary German cinema has been contradictory, if his historical visibility seems to bear little relation to his historical influence, this, I'd suggest, is the very point of the aesthetic and the reason he has been the inspiring muse of many German directors. Perhaps more than any other films being made today, Schroeter's films respond to history but only in proclaiming individual possibilities and realities beyond the historical predicament; they work within the structure of narrative but only to expose the brilliant edges around those structures; exasperating Marxist critics, they enounce themselves but only to say they exceed any historical place or enunciation. For Schroeter and his films, their articulations of history are always consciously less than the possibilities and passions that inform those articulations. Not too surprisingly, it is Michel Foucault who,

SALOME

in a conversation with Schroeter, inadvertently describes this historical edge on which Schroeter and his films always balance: whereas the art of self has in many ways become the main commodity of the German auteurs of the seventies, Schroeter's films, in Foucault's words, made "an art of the self which would be the complete contrary of self," expressing him and his films as a passion "which is always mobile but which does not move toward any given point," which "at its limit seeks to maintain itself only

to disappear."[10] In this odd encounter between these two archaeologists of history's edges, Schroeter then responds, somewhat later, quoting part of the concluding paragraph of Foucault's *Order of Things* as an unwitting summary of the historical moment that his films continually perform, a moment when the composed face of the subject balances fragily on the edge of the sea that surrounds history, an instant of history when "one can certainly wager than man would be erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."[11]

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2. Serge Daney, "Schroeter et Naples," *Cahiers du Cinéma,* 307 (January 1980), 29.
3. Daney, p. 28.
4. See Thomas Elsaesser's "The Postwar German Cinema," in *Fassbinder* (London: BFI, 1976), pp. 1-17; Timothy Corrigan, *New German Film: The Displaced Image* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); and Eric Rentschler's "American Friends and the New German Cinema," *New German Critique,* 24-25 (Fall-Winter 1981-82).
5. This is of course William Empson's phrase which Susan Sontag retrieved in her famous "Notes on 'Camp'" in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1961). Of the many pertinent remarks in this essay, the following seems particularly appropriate: "The canon of Camp can change . . . Time may enhance what seems simply dogged or lacking in fantasy now because we are too close to it, because it resembles too closely our own everyday fantasies, the fantastic nature of which we don't perceive. We are better able to enjoy a fantasy as fantasy when it is not our own" (p. 286).
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7. See "Werner Schroeter's Operatic Cinema," *Discourse,* 3 (Summer 1981), 52.
8. Lacan, *Le Seminaire livre XI* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 60.
9. Heath, *Questions of Cinema,* p. 124.
10. In Gerard Courant, *Werner Schroeter* (Paris: Goethe Institut), p. 45 and p. 39.
11. *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 387.

Reviews

L'ARGENT

(Money). Script and direction: Robert Bresson, from a story by Lev Tolstoy. Photography: Pasqualino de Santis, Emmanuel Machuel. Editing: Jean-François Naudon. France/Switzerland 1983. Cinecom International.

There are two levels of satisfaction in watching *L'Argent.* The first is to see Bresson, in his mid-70's, back at the peak of his form after the meandering ventures of *Lancelot du Lac* and *The Devil Probably.* The second is to discover that he has achieved this not by lowering his sights but by raising them, so that *L'Argent* involves risks he has never taken before.

The hallmarks of Bresson's style are unmistakable. The cast consists of unknowns who remain virtually deadpan, barred from any self-conscious acting. There is a severe economy in the images, which are tightly composed with the elements of interest nearly always in the foreground, and also in their editing, which favors rapid, elliptic leaps. Great attention is paid to the sound track, which often relates to sources outside the image; speech is sometimes copious but never explains or appeals to the emotions; there is no incidental music. The protagonist is young: in nearly all of his films, Bresson's special concern is with people who are just becoming aware of their capabilities and limitations. *L'Argent* also touches on two of his favorite themes: imprisonment, as in *A Man Escaped, Joan of Arc* and *Pickpocket* (to which may be added *Les Anges du péché,* with its convent walls), and suicide, as in *The Diary of a Country Priest, Mouchette, Une Femme Douce* and *The Devil Probably.*

Bresson's earlier films, however, convey a more general sense of confinement. Both mentally and physically, his characters keep going over the same ground—the repeated meetings on the bridge in *Four Nights of a Dreamer,* or the obsessive memory of the wife's suicide in *Femme Douce.* Even the most open of his other films—*Balthazar,* with its complex interplay of leading characters—forms a closed circle, as it begins with the birth and ends with the death of the eponymous donkey. *L'Argent,* by contrast, is centrifugal: from its matter-of-fact beginning it moves outward by progressively larger leaps.

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Robert Bresson's L'ARGENT

This structure derives only in part from the posthumous Tolstoy novella on which the film is based, *The Forged Note*. There, a single dishonest act touches off a chain reaction of evil that affects dozens of people; then, as one character is converted, a reverse chain reaction brings goodness back to the original offender. Bresson omits virtually all of the second chain and concentrates most of the spreading evil within one character.

The opening scenes (which follow Tolstoy closely) present almost a Marxist fable. Two well-to-do youths pass off a counterfeit bill at a photo store. The store owner and his assistant Lucien pass off this and other counterfeit bills to Yvon, an oil deliveryman. When Yvon innocently tries to pay with the bills at a cafe, the proprietor calls the police. At the photo store, Lucien denies ever having seen Yvon. When Yvon takes the matter to court, Lucien repeats his denial under oath (for which the store owner rewards him) and the suit is dismissed. Because Yvon is behaving like a troublemaker and his honesty appears questionable, he is fired. He gets a "job" as the driver of a getaway car for a bank robbery, but is caught and sentenced to three years in jail. Meanwhile, another sales clerk at the photo store has recognized the boys who passed the counterfeit bill and reports them to their school. The mother of one boy bribes the sales clerk to withdraw her accusation.

At this point the action moves onto less familiar ground. Lucien, who has been siphoning off some of the photo store's receipts, is fired and becomes a full-time thief. We hear of him as a kind of Robin Hood who has been sending some of his loot to the needy. (This is the only element that Bresson retains from Tolstoy's chain reaction of goodness.) Then Lucien is caught and sent to the same prison as Yvon. He wishes to atone for his perjury by helping Yvon escape, but Yvon rejects him out of hand, determined to exact revenge. Lucien makes an unsuccessful attempt to escape on his own.

Meanwhile, Yvon's small daughter falls sick and dies, and his wife Elise writes that she is leaving him. Yvon attempts suicide but is saved in the prison hospital. After he is released, he goes to a small hotel, kills the couple who own it, and makes off with money from the till. He next appears in a country town where he follows an elderly woman to her farmhouse. Although he tells her about the killings, she makes no attempt to inform the police and lets him sleep in the barn. Later he searches the house for money. At night, he takes an ax and kills the other members of the household, confronts the elderly woman with a demand for money, and then kills her. He goes to a cafe in the town, which is full of police hunting for him. After a drink, he approaches the police and confesses.

Even from this synopsis it should be clear how far Yvon travels from the apparent stability of his everyday life at the start to his violent aloneness at the end. Characters who at first seem to play important roles—the boys who pass the counterfeit bill, the photo store owner, Lucien, and Elise—disappear abruptly from the film, one after another. Lucien, whose role promises to offer a twisted reflection of Yvon's, is more heard of than seen: his last action, the attempted jailbreak, is conveyed only through the offscreen sounds of a siren and shouting voices.

After Yvon's release the action becomes even more fragmented. As his obsession takes control, there are fewer and fewer clues to the other characters and their roles. At first it seems possible that the elderly woman is Yvon's mother, and then that she may be taking pity on him by seeing him as a son she never had; but Bresson gives no facts beyond her actions and her impassive face to support any such conjecture. (In Tolstoy, she is a stranger who feels compassion for her killer, thus touching off the chain reaction of goodness.) Some of the other family

members appear on screen for hardly any longer a time living than dead; one, a paralyzed child, is never identified, and even after two viewings I don't know whether Yvon kills her. All that remains certain in the final scenes is Yvon's obsession.

Superficially, Yvon recalls the protagonist of another film based on a classic novella—Volker Schlöndorff's adaptation of Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas.* There too a man's anger over an injustice escalates into an obsession that can lead only to death. But Kohlhaas's demands always retain some link with reason, while the injustice against Yvon taps unsuspected resources of violence that take on a life of their own. Yvon has more in common with the science fiction or horror film hero-victim who becomes transformed by contact with alien powers—such as the infected astronaut in *The Creeping Unknown* or the aged and reborn Bowman in *2001.* For Bresson, however, these powers come not from outside but from within human nature.

If the beginning of the film recalls Marx, the ending seems closer to Freud. But Bresson gives no circumstantial details to account for Yvon's repressed violence. Instead, he implies that the drive to overcome the limits of one's "normal" behavior exists in everyone, and toward the end of the film he demonstrates this in himself, by challenging his own limits as a film-maker.

While Bresson has always exercised great care in the composition of scenes and in the use of sound, he has invariably avoided visual or aural effects for their own sake. Any beauty or emotion in his work seems to arise from objects or events that are filmed straightforwardly. Consider one of his most haunting sequences, the passing of the bateau mouche in *Four Nights.* While its impact is heightened by the context, it is filmed without any of Bresson's usual compositional and temporal ellipses: he lets the sights and sounds of the tourist boat, with its colored lights and Afro-Brazilian band, speak for themselves.

In the final sequences of *L'Argent* Bresson breaks with his usual austerity. The first signs of the break appear after Yvon enters the elderly woman's house and talks with her in the kitchen. As in others of his films, Bresson in *L'Argent* frequently lingers on doors and doorways, as if calling attention to the minor steps with which people may enter on or depart from a major course of action. In the early parts of the film, little depth is visible through any open doorway, and a character who passes through either disappears rapidly or reappears in a different scene. But when the elderly woman leaves the kitchen to check on her father, Bresson holds his camera on the open door until she passes through another doorway in the background. From now on, doorways become deep holes punched in space. When Yvon enters the house from the vegetable garden, the doorway left open behind him reveals distant sunlit trees and blue sky. When he squats beside an open gate, the background is filled with a sky-reflecting river. Bresson brings the same uncharacteristic sense of depth to an interlude that recalls the idyllic brevity of the bateau mouche in *Four Nights:* as Yvon helps the woman hang out the wash to dry, they pin it on the line *between* themselves and the camera, and a slight forward dolly further stresses the perspective. In the final scene, after the police have led Yvon out of the cafe, both the camera and the crowd of bystanders in the foreground continue to stare back inside the open doorway, as if waiting to see what other terrible force may emerge through the breached wall of their familiar world.

In the climactic killings Bresson goes even further beyond his usual style. Extreme ellipsis helps to give the sequence an extraordinary visual beauty: a hurricane lamp and an ax move through the shadowy house; pajama-clad figures leave their bedrooms and then lie dead. When Yvon finally confronts the elderly woman in her bed and violence becomes visible, Bresson uses light and framing to impose beauty even on that—Yvon's hands gripping the ax as he asks the elderly woman "Where is the money?"; her bedside lamp smashed as he swings the ax and blood spatters on the wall behind; the ax arcing through darkness (like Kubrick's moon shuttle dancing through space) after Yvon hurls it toward the river.

If the killings arouse horror amid their beauty, it is largely because Bresson breaks another of his rules and allows emotion to

L'ARGENT

be expressed. Admittedly it comes not from a human but from an animal, for which there is some precedent in *Balthazar:* the donkey flares its eyes and in other ways behaves more expressively than any human character. But even Maria Casarès in *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne,* which was made before Bresson could cast his films with unknowns, never displayed as much emotion as the farmhouse dog that befriended Yvon. Once Yvon begins to strike, the dog runs howling along corridors and up and down stairs in an anguished to and fro between killer and victims. As Bresson adds the mutation of his own style to the other signs of disorientation—the falling away of characters, the fragmentation of events, the mystery of who's who at the farmhouse—he charges the end of the film with extraordinary power.

It is easy to interpret *L'Argent* in religious terms, with Yvon's emergent violence standing for the original sin from which he cannot, without divine help, escape. Further elaboration is possible: that prison is a metaphor for earthly life, with suicide as the ultimate jailbreak. But the film also speaks to viewers who do not share Bresson's religious viewpoint. To someone like myself who believes that the value of Marxism and Freudian psychology lies in spotlighting defects rather than in putting them right, the assurance and economy with which *L'Argent* passes through and beyond their realms are understandably impressive; but even those who disagree with that belief could find the film an exhilarating challenge. Bresson draws the viewer into a world that reflects the one we live in but develops with increasing speed from complexity to a terrible simplicity.

L'Argent's swift movement and underlying tension (What will Yvon do next?) establish a kinship with popular commercial movies—as I hinted earlier with references to science fiction and horror. While critics disagree about the relative value of "art" films and popular movies (some still follow the traditional course of preferring the former, while others opt for the vigor or semiotic richness of the latter), nearly all assume that there is some basic distinction between the two. *L'Argent* calls this into question. Bresson is an "art" film maker par excellence, seeking the greatest possible control over the images and sounds that reach the public in his name. At the same time, he has followed many of the major trends of commercial movie making—such as extensive location filming, the abandonment of black and white for color, and the free adaptation of literary sources. His choice of nonprofessional actors and his refusal to let them act has less in common with serious dramatic practice than with the casting of movie stars, who are valued for the consistent way they look and sound. Bresson even makes effective use of the popular film's urge to trendiness, since *L'Argent* begins with a close-up of a typical computer-age device—an automatic teller machine. As the machine's panel snaps shut, resembling the hatch of a spacecraft, it foreshadows both Yvon's isolation and his journey into darkness.

Bresson is noted—rightly—for parsimony and restraint, qualities rarely found in popular movies. Yet his sparse selection of images and sounds is drawn from a wide repertoire of film-making resources, and their combinations build up a complexity that may not be apparent at any given moment. It is this implicit richness of Bresson's films that embraces elements of the more familiar screen view of the world. And it is because viewers can sense this familiarity that Bresson at his best—as in *L'Argent*—can share with them the vivid, alien experience of his own eyes and ears. —WILLIAM JOHNSON

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BORN IN FLAMES

Written, directed, and produced by Lizzie Borden. Photography: Ed Bowes, Al Santana, Lizzie Borden, Chris Hegedus, Petter Hutton, Johanna Heer, Gary Hill, Michael Oblowitz, Greta Schiller. Music: The Bloods, The Red Crayola, Ibis.

Born in Flames is a successful film about a failed revolution. "New York City," announces the cultivated voice of radio announcing, "Ten years after the Social-Democratic War of Liberation." The disembodied voice proclaims "a time when all New Yorkers take pride in remembering the most peaceful revolution the world has known." Taking advantage of the conventions of science fiction, director Lizzie Borden proposes a kind of futuristic feminism that does not differ greatly from that which we now know. The extraordinary exposition of the film is what reveals its essential "sci-fi" quality, however, rather than the projection of the narrative into some indefinite future of an America in the throes of a social-democratic government. In fact, Borden's cynicism extends equally to the revolution and feminism. Because the women in the film see themselves as true socialists and not pragmatists sacrificing certain revolutionary ideals for social stability, they remain the sole revolutionary element in a moribund American socialist state. Nevertheless, the women themselves cannot seem to rid their own movement of class distinctions and discriminations inherited from the white male-dominated structure. Nothing seems to have changed.

The protagonist is Adelaide Norris, played by Jeanne Satterfield, who is attempting to form a Women's Lesbian Army, the most salient result of which is a bicycle brigade of whistle-blowing women ready to swoop down on rape attempts or, on another level, to police male construction workers complaining that female colleagues are acing them out of the best jobs. In other spheres of influence, Norris tries to create a link with two underground radio stations. Radio Ragazza has a punk rock bias with Isabel (Adele Bertei) rapping delightfully anarchic devilry, which lets us peek into Lizzie Borden's hip South Bronx sensibility (where all art forms are perforce a put-on of Art; and it might be added that Borden used to write for *Artforum*). The other radio station is Phoenix, run by Honey (born Honey, as Ms. Borden was born Lizzie Borden) and her black sisters with radical rhetoric that has not been heard for about a decade in America. The status quo is further challenged by Zella Wylie (played enthusiastically by Flo Kennedy), who spouts feminist wisdom and represents an older generation with passionate ideals but realistic goals. While Adelaide and her racially mixed following slowly begin to form plans of action, they run into an intellectual band of feminists with privileged white middle-class views that call for consensus and more dialogue. The "dialogue" of the film is actually a dialectic, as the various groups offer representative views of their interest groups, and thus reveal the reason for the splintering of the feminist movement.

A truly rational discussion takes place in one of the many sequences loosely knit together by Adelaide's attempt at unification. A debate ensues as to what use should be made of weapons—whether to use the kind that would permanently damage the enemy or rather the kind to put the enemy out of commission only temporarily. One sees the humane impact here of feminist values being applied to power-wielding political decisions, and hearing such diverse points of view is enlightening, for it reveals how certain alternatives are ignored, chided or thought impractical in ordinary political dialogue in the United States. But without dwelling on ideologically revolutionary ideas, *Born in Flames* leaps vigorously into other dilemmas in a pace that is quickened by Borden's extensive experience editing such things as *From Mao to Mozart* or sculptor Richard Serra's *Stahlwerk,* as well as Michael Oblowitz's *Minus Zero,* all of which have turned documentary footage into art films of distinction.

Produced in fits and starts over a period of four years, *Born in Flames* has a smouldering appeal that seems to guarantee us that its topical issues and references are not just futuristic feminism. Another debate is about whether the photo of a martyred sister, dead after an abortive attempt to smuggle weapons, should be used as a rallying point, or whether this would foster a type of fetishism of her dead body. It is to the film's credit that it avoids waxing pedantic or didactic on any of the political points it exposes, although some critics have found it diffuse and superficial because it avoids advocating positions and

can even be seen to lightly mock the seriousness with which these women go after a definition of feminism. When a radio-feminist informs her listeners, "We are going to redesign the mindscape of an alienated nation," it is because these women want to show new designs in thinking rather than offer fashionable rhetoric. Interviews on the street with secretaries and women who still need decent child-care facilities reveal the on-going alienation in agit-prop film-making devices. If otherwise well-paid secretaries are striking because they are treated like coffee-fetching slaves, some of the complaints aired in the popular movie *9 to 5* are being acted upon.

While the many strands of feminist frustration are plaited into some kind of narrative, the increasingly wild-eyed plot line finally zeroes in on an act of virtual terrorism. The women seize a television station and air their views on the evening news. This is an act sure to have negative repercussions, for the Women's Liberation Army is not seen to have "liberated" the airwaves, but rather interrupted the President of the United States—called "Metzger" (which means, ironically, in German "butcher")—in mid-address as he proposes a program to grant wages to housewives. Borden constantly shows such socialist reforms and feminist aspirations erupting in conflict and tripping up their own realization. Can oppression of women possibly be eliminated as long as men are designing the solutions? The speculative, aggressive, essayist quality of *Born in Flames* also turns a jaundiced eye on women's own programs as being too often too self-centered and refusing to accommodate the mass of women and their heterogeneous interests. Which is, actually, nothing more than a recapitulation of masculine political models!

The exhilarating effect of the film's approach to the representative groups is a result of a disjunctive narrative, edited in the manner of "news reportage," on-the-scene coverage of events out of control. And yet a close look at the film reveals a tight structure, built up of incidents culled from the very "ordinary" and therefore unnoticed oppression women have been experiencing for decades. To talk for 90 minutes of those trivial irritations seems radical in the extreme, and yet, it is the cumulative effect of minor oppressions made conscious that creates a revolutionary situation. *Born in Flames* stops short of being a call to arms, because its focus is ultimately on the bitter feuds within the women's community. The vulnerable contingent, made parodic by Borden perhaps because of her own work on a women's magazine called *Heresies,* seems to be a group of white female newspaper editors working with the Party to define the "correct" position on women's issues and always hitting wide of the mark, if they intend to serve women. The old term "P.C." (politically correct) could not be applied to Borden's film either, for it portrays the efforts of women as futile, no matter how strong their beliefs, or how well-intentioned their attempts at unity.

Borden is not only so daring as to posit a Women's Liberation Army, but her fantasy extends to a situation in which one of that army's leaders is killed by the Socialist government, in a reflection of self-serving opportunism and posturing as a peace-keeping force in American life. A society in which rape, prostitution and on-the-job harassment continue has somehow failed in achieving or even valuing egalitarianism as a fundamental goal. To see the government as ready and willing to permit the murder of a "dissident" is really to despair of effective political action in any "well-governed" state.

What Borden ultimately proves in her film is that women have gained control, perhaps only temporarily, of the language (therefore the brilliant use of the radio station) and the definition of what feminism must mean, and yet they are still in search of a description of themselves. This gives them a base for power and the potential for challenging men's traditional monopoly of violence. But most

BORN IN FLAMES

important, hiding behind the women's movement are issues of racism, economic exploitation, socialism, and power struggles. Invariably, the policies of yesterday's revolutions grow stagnant.

Lizzie Borden says she started in 1977 from the point "of not knowing, not just about the film ever becoming a film, but of how it would develop. I tried to create a collaborative construction." For example, she had what she calls "a fantasy" of a bicycle brigade, which plays a small role in the film, "and it may be utopian or even silly, but I wanted it to reflect the nonviolent struggle of just making the world safe for women."

Why did she call it the Women's Liberation "army"? Borden admits it lacks the hierarchical structure of a traditional army, yet it had the sense of many, many people fighting, and in thinking it through, it provided the scene where the women debate the effectiveness of unity. "Is it better to present the force of a lion or 500 mice?" "Well, 500 mice are going to confuse and terrorize and challenge much more than a lion, especially in the face of people who think of themselves as lion-tamers," one woman decides.

The spontaneity of action eliminated the need of a script, for which there is no credit. Borden says she thinks of the film itself as a film born on the editing table, and she herself is an editor and edited many other peoples' films in order to finance the film (at about $40,000). Improvisation was the key. "Non-actors can't work with scripts," says Borden. "Even where there were scripts, we threw them away." Flo Kennedy's actual role developed during the film, and it was Flo Kennedy's tutelage that helped create the heroine/martyr Adelaide. Thus the documentary approach goes far beyond recording "life as it is." Life as it is helped create "life as it should be or *could* be." —KAREN JAEHNE

SILKWOOD

Director: Mike Nichols. Script: Nora Ephron and Alice Arlen. Producers: Mike Nichols and Michael Hausman. An ABC Motion Picture released by Twentieth Century-Fox.

Silkwood is issue-oriented Cinema of Quality after the fashion of *The China Syndrome, Norma Rae, Missing,* and *Under Fire*—films whose purported polemical intent never gets too much in the way of adventure, mystery, and romance. Because such enterprises tend to lose momentum—not to mention box office—by veering from straightforward melodrama for sharp detours left of center, commercial imperatives tend to win out over political ones. Like its generic antecedents, *Silkwood* measures the demands of entertainment against ideology, tilting the balance first one way, then the other, and finally weighs in heavier as soap opera bio-pic than soap box agit-prop.

Silkwood's inspiration, of course, is the late union activist Karen Silkwood, in the early seventies a lab worker at the Kerr-McGee Nuclear Corporation's Cimarron Plutonium Recycling Facility in Crescent, Oklahoma, then a major supplier of processed plutonium for the nation's nuclear power industry. Silkwood outspokenly alleged widespread negligence and deception at Kerr-McGee; in 1974, while driving to an appointment with a *New York Times* reporter, she died in a car crash that, depending on partisan sympathies, was either coincidental or conspiratorial. Whatever the truth of the real Karen Silkwood's life and death, as a posthumous vehicle for alternative values she was irresistible. The confluence of blue-collar rebellion, anti-nuke sentiment, feminist consciousness, and an evocative demise produced a counter-cultural star of the highest magnitude. A "high concept" package that juicy was assured of becoming a major motion picture.

Wisely refraining from either genuflecting or blaspheming before the image of the anti-nuke movement's patron saint, director Mike Nichols, screenwriters Nora Ephron and Alice Arlen, and actress Meryl Streep strive to create a resonant screen character. No true-believing union maid, their Silkwood is a flesh-and-blood good ol' gal who resists adoration. She is a woman of mixed motivations and uncertain affections whose reasons for taking on The Company have as much to do with gut-level recalcitrance as high-flown idealism: when an unctuous Washington-based labor leader declaims on the "moral imperative" involved in their efforts to expose Kerr-McGee, she later echoes his phrase as if to persuade herself of her intentions. Streep, embodying

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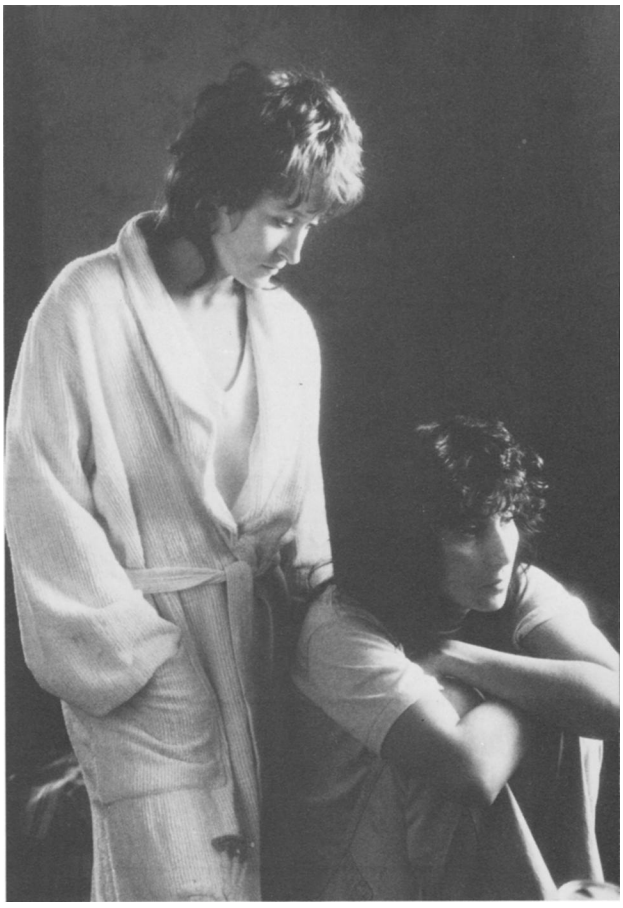
the role with accustomed professionalism, has the regional accent, attire, and cigarette moves down cold, but what makes her character breathe is the emotional complexity behind her actions.

It is that complexity, the refusal to hew to a party line, that makes *Silkwood* stand apart from so many ideologically correct, emotionally dry films. Though the film-makers do cast their lot with the anti-nuke forces on the most controversial items of the Silkwood agenda (Kerr-McGee's reckless disregard for safety procedures and the culpability of an unnamed sinister force in Silkwood's contamination and fatal car wreck), they are more concerned with presenting a dramatically convincing portrait of blue-collar life in America. This is an audacious undertaking for Hollywood elites whose idea of authentic Okie *mise-en scène* is Confederate flags, gun racks, and Coors beer (or Lone Star during the side trip to Texas.) But if the recreation of rank-and-file style betrays distanced observer status, the film's handle on the emotional compromises of workingclass existence is right on the money.

As *Silkwood* opens, Karen, her salt-of-the-earth boyfriend Drew (Kurt Russell), and gal pal Dolly (Cher) are a close-knit unit whose familial warmth shields them from the rigors of their plutonium workplace. If the typical nine-to-five accommodation divides life into separate spheres of "home" and "work," the emotional compensations of the one justifying the alienated labor of the other, Karen's problem is that she can't keep her categories straight: she takes work personally. Even before her anti-nuke consciousness gets raised, she's a subversive element in the workforce because she won't leave her humor, tears, or sexuality at home. She can also be something of a pain in the ass—hitting up friends for favors, goofing off, wandering around the cafeteria picking up random lunches.

The crew at Kerr-McGee for its part is hardly a robotic band of exploited proles. Brought into sharp focus by an ensemble of gifted character actors (Fred Ward as a world-wise, deadpan Indian, E. Katherine Graham as a good-hearted working wife, Henderson Forsythe as a less-than-dynamic union representative, and especially Sudie Bond as an elderly worker whose contamination first spurs Karen to action), their individualism precludes any naive assumptions of worker solidarity. Alternately amused by Karen's liveliness and annoyed at her breaches of assembly-line etiquette, these "trained technicians" become outright hostile when her union activities threaten their meal ticket. Karen's sense of commitment isolates her not only from a malevolent management (nastily personified by Craig T. Nelson and Bruce McGill) but from co-workers who are quite content with the trade-offs they've made.



SILKWOOD

The isolation hits close to home, providing the occasion for some inventive melodrama as Drew and Dolly come to resent the disruptions Karen's crusade wreaks on their cozy triad relationship. Drew, a basic Friday-on-my-mind type, can tolerate Karen's casual infidelities, but not the personal estrangement. "What do you think we're working with over there—puffed wheat?" he says, and eventually splits from both Kerr-McGee and Karen. Dolly, though presumably pining in unrequited lesbian love for Karen, plays the child role in this surrogate family. She is as upset at Drew's departure, and delighted by his return, as Karen herself. For a brief period, Dolly gets

SILKWOOD

her own lover, a mortuary beautician (Diana Scarwid) who delivers a terse evaluation of her work on Kerr-McGee's employees: "They all look like they died before they died." But here too she acts the little girl. She's shown making up—painted toes, powdered face—not making love. The interpersonal convolutions are a bit overripe, but they make their point: the cost of not doing business is high.

Like their employee, though, Kerr-McGee has crossed the accepted boundaries between home and work, a distinction Nichols builds up so to better demolish in the film's climactic melt-down. At work, the editing is abrupt, the atmosphere chilly, and the action fraught with Hitchcockian tension. The "ticking bombs" at the Kerr-McGee plant are above the entranceways: bright-red radiation indicators whose sudden clanging signals that a worker has been exposed to plutonium ("cooked" in company jargon). A decontamination team in protective suits then hustles the victims to a medical lab for a horrifying scrub-down. (The reverberations from Streep's *Sophie's Choice* role nail down the obvious comparison between these and other shower scenes, doubtless giving them more power than they deserve.) In stark, cinematic contrast, the trio's rural farmhouse is a warm refuge where Karen, Drew, and Dolly bicker, make love, horse around, and in general act out the familiar rituals of domestic life. The pace is relaxed, the space inviting, and relationships intimate. The sense of violation is palpable when Kerr-McGee's decontamination team descends on the retreat and rips it apart looking for the source of Karen's plutonium poisoning. Quite literally, Karen has taken the job home with her.

The destruction of the farmhouse (not Karen's later, expected death) is *Silkwood*'s emotional and thematic pay-off: with plutonium, there are no separate spheres; hive will always encroach on hearth. (In the film's nicest subplot, Karen's co-worker Thelma comes to the same realization about her daughter's terminal cancer.) The invasion of the farmhouse is also the occasion for a crowd-pleasing moment: when Drew returns to wander through the sterile shell of his former home, he encounters Karen's smirking supervisor, Winston (Craig T. Nelson), and impulsively flattens him with a sucker punch. The scene is typical of a not-so-subtle strategy of meaning by implication on the part of the lawsuit-leery film-makers. Winston has been doctoring plutonium rod negatives and stands to lose more than his job if Karen continues rocking the boat. His presence at the farmhouse marks him as the culprit who "spiked" Karen's urine sample with raw plutonium, thus explaining the radioactive readings Kerr-McGee's experts pick up throughout Karen's home. Similarly, the ease with which Streep-as-Karen maneuvers her Honda Civic—and there's as much driving in *Silkwood* as in *Smokey and the Bandit*—belies the likelihood that she fell victim to a simple auto accident. The messages are implicit, but unmistakable.

As *Silkwood* moves towards its preordained closure, Karen comes in for the kind of wide-eyed Joan of Arc treatment the rest of the film managed to avoid. A ponderous sound track reprise of Streep's a cappella version of "Amazing Grace" accompanies Karen's iconographic death tableau and a slow-motion replay of her last, fateful farewell from Drew freezes her heroic image in time. This now-she-belongs-to-the-ages finale turns the flesh-and-blood woman of the previous two hours back into the poster girl of anti-nuke legend. The transformation denies the best of what went before as Silkwood the person becomes Silkwood the personification. If the latter makes a better cause, the former makes a better film.

—TOM DOHERTY

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Round-Up at the *FQ* Corral:

THE YEAR'S FILM BOOKS

Once again we have sought to cover virtually all English-language film books published in the past year—i.e., since mid-1983. A few titles missed in previous round-ups are also included; some recently received titles will be reviewed in a subsequent issue. The arrangement is alphabetical by author within each category (brief listings are alphabetized separately following the reviews).

Mindful of the overflow of book material in last year's survey, this time we have tried to keep many reviews shorter, but we have been defeated by the number of titles deserving extended discussion. Once more, the categories History, Reference, Technical, Television, Theory, and Miscellaneous have been put off until the Fall issue, along with our review of French books.

This degree of comprehensiveness is not workable, and we are rethinking our book coverage policies. Comments are welcome on what should be preserved, what can be abbreviated, and what can be dispensed with.

Autobiographies and Biographies

IMMORAL MEMORIES
An Autobiography by Eisenstein

By Sergei Eisenstein. Translated with an introduction by Herbert Marshall. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1983. $19.95.

In the last reels of his final film, *Ivan the Terrible, Part II,* Sergei Eisenstein's screen suddenly and strikingly finds its true colors. The subject matter of the sequence is a banquet at which Ivan taunts and then destroys the most foolish and dangerous pretender to his throne. With the first wild chords of the banquet theme, the black-and-white world of Ivan's descent into a murderous paranoia becomes color, but not as we know it. It is, rather, a black and red montage, tinged periodically by gold and flame.

As he cut the sequence in late 1945, Eisenstein knew that Stalin, on whose career *Ivan the Terrible* was so obviously based, would never permit the film's distribution. In all likelihood, its director would be lucky if his punishment were limited to the disgrace and obscurity that had followed far less audacious projects a decade before.

Within weeks of the completion of *Ivan the Terrible, Part II,* Eisenstein found himself beyond these considerations. A heart attack in February, 1946, left the 48-year-old director with a feeling of profound mortality. And then, in addition to his ailment, Eisenstein discovered from international reviews of *Ivan the Terrible, Part I,* that the cinema world saw him as dead already. A French critic wrote that "the appearance of any film by Eisenstein arouses as much amazement as would a new play by Corneille. There have been so many attempts to give cinema a history that it has begun to seem as if the directors of the classical cinema lived in another age . . ."

It was in this atmosphere that Stalin's most brilliant and dangerous fool undertook his last creative effort. *Immoral Memories,* Eisenstein's deathbed autobiography, in some ways justifies his critic's view of the artist as denizen of an obsolete Olympus. Throughout its studiously digressive text, the book is the chronicle of a prewar consciousness, a mind less aware of irreversible change than of the cultural heritage from which change might reasonably and sensibly proceed. There is little here of the revolution, depravations and turmoil that marked the years and places about which Eisenstein writes. Even the political struggles with which he was personally involved seem nothing more than catalysts for meetings with charming fellow travelers or run-ins with buffoons who invite caricature in the classic mode.

Yet, if only sporadically, *Immoral Memories* does provide the colors of Eisenstein. Without reservation he lionizes Vsevolod Meyerhold, his theatrical mentor and a man whose life and memory Stalin had long since obliterated. Worse yet, in the Russia of 1946, Eisenstein refuses for an instant to regret the excitement of the avant-garde. What few gestures he makes in the direction of orthodox aesthetics are obliterated in homages that stretch from the early Soviet theatre to his meeting with James Joyce.

Perhaps what is most valuable in *Immoral*

Memories is the perfection of Eisenstein's own contribution to that avant-garde. This is montage in prose. Images and ideas find each other, collide and multiply their meanings. And above all the little collisions is the recurrent montage that splices "the boy from Riga" (frequent possessor of his century's most elaborate toy) and the well-read grandfather of film theory.

Immoral Memories is the title Eisenstein chooses to connote a certain kind of pointlessness to the panorama of a single mind's experience. But the title's playful sensuality is also redeemed as the book brings us the pleasures of experiencing a polished style freed within a determined eclecticism.

Herbert Marshall, a former student of Eisenstein and current Director of the Center for Soviet and East European Studies at Southern Illinois University, does justice to Eisenstein's experiments in prose with a scrupulous yet readable translation. Marshall's equally meticulous appendices and fanatical footnoting of nearly all proper nouns in the text may be something of a counterpoint to Eisenstein's carefree ramblings. But any quibbles about the editor/translator's intervention must be silenced by the excellence of his introduction to Eisenstein and his world. Here Marshall provides the kind of insider's pathos normally heard at gatherings of the most knowledgeable Slavophiles. We are led into reading Eisenstein's daring within the context of his claustrophobic world. It is through Marshall's guidance that we are made to feel the cold dark walls encompassing a great mind's last supper.

—SETH FELDMAN

JANE FONDA
Heroine for Our Times

By Thomas Kiernan. New York: Delilah Books, 1982. $9.95.

This effort is Kiernan's second attempt to produce a Jane Fonda biography. (The first was published in 1973.) Fonda's political activism establishes her as a far more valuable subject than those of most Hollywood biographies. Her political participation is exactly what this book *should* be about; in fact, the last 150 pages, which provide a harrowing account of Fonda's political activities are highly informative reporting. But, before getting to this, we have to suffer Kiernan's maudlin account of Fonda's early life as the misunderstood child of a famous father as well as his grossly inaccurate and inadequate observations and assessments of film history and films. For instance, he categorizes Vadim's *And God Created Woman* as a "mere sex and nudity entertainment," *Klute* as "an ordinary crime thriller," while *Julia* "ended up a woman's picture" and the embarrassingly superficial *Fun With Dick and Jane* is touted as "a bitingly amusing satire on contemporary American life."

Kiernan has carefully researched and recounted Fonda's public maturation process from Hollywood starlet, runaway American in Paris/sex kitten/moral rebel, champion of racial equality (including her association with Indian and Black Panther organizations), and defender of North Vietnam's politics to the current commitments: anti-nuclear power and pro-feminism.

Kiernan neither glorifies Fonda's political successes nor emphasizes her failures, but his estimate of her is nonetheless melodramatized and sexist. He considers her "naive" and undereducated but fails to compare her in either respect to her many equally "qualified" political critics and opponents. His consistent suggestion that her participation in various movements was preceded by a relationship with a particular man is even contradicted by his own facts. He condescends, in a familiar male manner, by referring to her as "Jane," though he refrains from calling Olivier "Larry" in another biography. Finally, Kiernan and/or his publisher attempt to decorate the text with the obligatory publicity stills, but neither text nor pictures manage to reduce Fonda to the status of possessable spectacle. She is still a part of the real world with concerns and a voice to challenge the trivializers.

—MARY WHITELEY

ROMAN

By Roman Polanski. New York: Morrow, 1984. $17.95.

For a person of Polanski's indubitable originality and subtlety as a film-maker, this is a perplexingly conventional autobiography. Per-

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Kiernan has carefully researched and recounted Fonda's public maturation process from Hollywood starlet, runaway American in Paris/sex kitten/moral rebel, champion of racial equality (including her association with Indian and Black Panther organizations), and defender of North Vietnam's politics to the current commitments: anti-nuclear power and pro-feminism.

Kiernan neither glorifies Fonda's political successes nor emphasizes her failures, but his estimate of her is nonetheless melodramatized and sexist. He considers her "naive" and undereducated but fails to compare her in either respect to her many equally "qualified" political critics and opponents. His consistent suggestion that her participation in various movements was preceded by a relationship with a particular man is even contradicted by his own facts. He condescends, in a familiar male manner, by referring to her as "Jane," though he refrains from calling Olivier "Larry" in another biography. Finally, Kiernan and/or his publisher attempt to decorate the text with the obligatory publicity stills, but neither text nor pictures manage to reduce Fonda to the status of possessable spectacle. She is still a part of the real world with concerns and a voice to challenge the trivializers.

—MARY WHITELEY

ROMAN

By Roman Polanski. New York: Morrow, 1984. $17.95.

For a person of Polanski's indubitable originality and subtlety as a film-maker, this is a perplexingly conventional autobiography. Per-

haps his personality has been filtered out by the writing process (tape-recorded reminiscences were put into prose by Edward Behr and perfected by two other people—who get credit rather like screenwriters). Perhaps his English is not really good enough to convey certain nuances of reflection, and so he opted for a flat narrative of events. But perhaps, also, there is some mysterious "arrested" adolescent quality about Polanski the man which the film-maker somehow transcends. In any event, there is not much light thrown here upon Polanski's "creative process," though the basic story told by Barbara Leaming in her earlier book is amplified with many personal details. It becomes pretty evident that being an auteur these days is not easy on the self or on the persons auteurs associate with. And to the customary pressures of the role Polanski added puzzling sexual predilections a little like Chaplin's. Several obvious Freudian explanations of his inveterate cocksmanship lie ready to hand, but his lifelong terrible luck may also have something to do with it: fucking, after all, is a way of proving you are still alive, and the real or feigned innocence of nubile teenagers may have a special appeal to someone who has faced more than his share of horror. The ironies in the book are many, and though usually flatly stated they are often poignant. "In all my many premonitions of disaster," he reports just after his arrest on the statutory-rape charge, "one thought had never crossed my mind: that I should be sent to prison, my life and career ruined, for making love." But as his own account makes clear, it wasn't exactly love; indeed he didn't even *like* the kid. What he loved was films, and perhaps, for a while, Sharon Tate. —E.C.

A PASSION FOR FILMS

By Richard Roud. New York: Viking, 1983. $16.95.

Richard Roud's biography of Henri Langlois, co-founder of the Cinémathèque Française and Godfather of the French New Wave, is an extremely valuable historical volume which functions on two levels. First, Roud provides an intimate and often compelling portrait of Langlois as both a remarkable and contradictory figure, distinguishing myth from reality so that Langlois is always perceived as a flesh and blood human being with his distinctive virtues and vices. Second, Roud dutifully chronicles the tumultuous history of the Cinémathèque itself, a subject worthy of its own study. As Truffaut perceptively suggests in his judicious Foreword, Roud plays the investigative reporter here, telling us as much about ourselves as Langlois.

Roud's close association with Langlois is an asset as well as a detriment. He openly admits his admiration for Langlois and offers a full-bodied portrait, based on first-hand observation whenever appropriate. While Roud presents different interpretations and points of view, there are moments when he should be more critical of Langlois's conduct.

Langlois was a tireless, eccentric, and paranoid archivist whose uncompromised devotion to film and the Cinémathèque were undeniable. Langlois literally saved thousands of films from being lost or destroyed, and he resurrected such forgotten artists as Louise Brooks, Feuillade, and Hawks. On the other hand, Langlois was a stubborn elitist who enjoyed collecting films for the sheer pleasure of possessing them. He was adept at playing politics, but there were usually ulterior motives behind every maneuvre. Langlois complied with copyright laws when they pertained to his friends or powerful studios, but he quit FIAF and complained about its copyright violations. He cooperated with the Nazis during the Occupation to preserve and expand the Cinémathèque's collection (a clandestine affair right out of a spy thriller), but later shunned those who were not useful to him. He collected everything he could get his hands on, but was a disorganized archivist. He organized diverse film programs, but annoyingly kept the schedules a secret.

Langlois's power and influence were enormous, as evidenced by the rousing support he garnered when Malraux attempted to strip him of his position in 1968. For once Langlois's paranoia was not unfounded. Roud reminds us that his genius was two-fold: Langlois taught us the importance of film as a primary resource (his programs were actually montages of film history in action), and he taught us the importance of unifying the world in an effort to preserve our cinematic past.

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CARY GRANT
A Celebration

By Richard Schickel. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983.

Cary Grant once said, "Everybody wants to be Cary Grant . . . I want to be Cary Grant." That quote encapsulates the thesis of the book: that the Grant screen character was created by the star out of an image of a person that he wanted to become.

Schickel defends this claim by analyzing both the actor's life and career. The study of the latter is particularly valid because Grant was a Hollywood maverick who, except for his very early career at Paramount, was not under a long-term contract with any studio.

Since the book is a psychobiography, it has the drawback of relying on speculation, rather than fact, to present many of its arguments. In spite of this weakness of the form, star-struck Schickel's arguments for his theory of the evolution of the debonair, archetypal movie star are generally convincing.

Grant started his film career as a slightly stiff leading man. His acting range was not broadened until he collaborated with directors such as Hawks, Stevens, Cukor and McCarey, particularly in the screwball comedies of the middle to late thirties. During this period, Grant showed a refreshing zaniness that was generally lacking in his comedies of the fifties and sixties.

When the screwball genre lost its energy, Grant's work slipped. His comedies of the early forties lacked zest. Attempts to play against type (*Penny Serenade, None But the Lonely Heart*) were artistically unrewarding.

Subsequent collaborations with Hitchcock, however, made use of Grant's darker side, which was best put to use in *Sylvia Scarlett.* Schickel cites, and agrees with, the David Thomson quote, "He can be attractive and unattractive simultaneously; there is a bright side and a dark side to him, but whichever is dominant, the other creeps into view." It is debatable, however, what impact these roles had on the rest of Grant's career. Other performers, under the direction of Hitchcock, revealed a similar "dark side."

In *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer* (1947) Grant achieved an image that male moviegoers envied. In that film, and throughout the rest of his career, he became a knight in shining armor for his leading ladies. Yet, as Schickel accurately points out, while Grant's late career was financially successful, his films were not, for the most part, as interesting as his early work. Schickel aptly writes, "The titles are all alike and one has trouble, without a trot, remembering which one belongs with which hazy memory." Grant seems to have substituted style and image for complex characterization in his films of the late fifties and early sixties.

Schickel's writing is as slick and witty as one of Grant's romantic comedies. Like his subject, Schickel has a style that is polished and enjoyable. But he not only thoroughly documents Grant's career, but also emphasizes how each important phase evolved. I found Schickel's book highly informative about Grant's career, and it also provided much insight into film trends.

—NEAL RENTZ

JOAN CRAWFORD: THE ULTIMATE STAR

By Alexander Walker: New York: Harper & Row, 1983. $29.95.

As a real star, carrying her own vehicles, Joan Crawford had a longer film career than Pickford or Gable. But it is still probably safe to say that she intrigues film buffs to about the degree they find the old big-studio system interesting, so Alexander Walker's new Crawford book properly emphasizes the glamor years at MGM. Both in format and in terms of research information from the same studio films, this is a replica of his previous coffee-table book on Garbo.

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On the private controversies, Walker is generally pro-Crawford and toughest on husbands #1 and #2 (Fairbanks and Tone). There are some good stories about the famous manic drive, and a probably fruitless attempt to explain why it is unwise to treat Christina Crawford as an important film historian.

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Brandreth, Gyles. *John Gielgud: A Celebration.* Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown, 1984. $14.95. Gielgud's career began at the Old Vic in 1921; he is one of the most durable as well as most ingenious of performers. Brandreth recounts many interesting episodes in his stage and screen life (including his rather edgy work opposite Olivier in the 1935 *Romeo and Juliet,* when they alternated as Romeo and Mercutio) and traces the ups and downs of his life and reviews. —E.C.

Crawley, Tony. *The Steven Spielberg Story.* New York: Quill, 1983. Paper, $5.95. In the mid-seventies, as Crawley notes, the San Francisco Film Festival had a "ridiculously early retrospective" of director Steven Spielberg's collected works (four of them altogether). It still, even some years and some films later, seems ridiculously early for a biography, even if the director's films now include *E.T.,* "Spielberg's most successful film and possibly the world's." A little perspective is needed. In terms of beginning-middle-end, the Spielberg story really hasn't even got a *middle* yet. True, it has a dynamite beginning, but beginnings are for headlines, not biographies. True also, that it's probably no use, in terms of perspective, waiting a bit for the hoorah over *E.T.* to die down—*E.T. II* will just start it up all over again. So don't expect calm or quiet or order from Crawley's too-much-too-soon book—you'll find facts, anecdotes, quotes (from Spielberg, his co-workers, critics, etc.), but no grand, informing historical sense to it. Like some of Spielberg's own work, it skims the surface of its subject, sometimes nimbly, sometimes not. It doesn't really add that much to what we know, or seem to know, about the man, from his films and from interviews, though it does an adequate job of *collating* what we know. It constitutes a pretty extensive "file" on Spielberg. (One, in fact, which he might profitably have reviewed himself before publication—certainly, he would have caught transcribing slips like (page 16) "New Art" for "Nuart," an LA theatre haunted by Spielberg in the sixties, and (page 90) "Commander Cody" for "Commando Cody," everyone's favorite Sky Marshal of the Universe.) The tone—whether it be Crawley's or Spielberg's—ranges from droll (Spielberg declaring, as he leaves behind forever the headaches of Martha's Vineyard and the making of *Jaws,* "I shall *not* return!"), to cloying (paean after paean to the wonders of childhood). The book is, of necessity, inconclusive. It can't answer the most fascinating question re: Spielberg's career—will he fulfill the promise of the best passages of *Duel, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, E.T.*? Will, that is, his future work be stronger on substance than on sheen? He can, now, make a movie *look*—in terms of lighting, camera movement and placement, color—as good as anyone can. His movies entertain, amuse, excite. But one wants *more* from them, because at their best—in, say, the concluding sequences of *Close Encounters* or in his segment of *Twilight Zone—The Movie*—they *do* more. They're not just super-efficient light-and-shadow shows. At their best, they resonate, whether it be with the chilly intimations of *Duel* or with the warmth of the endings of, respectively, *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* His films, so far, seem like *fragments* of a vision—Roy Neary at the mashed-potatoes stage of *Close Encounters.* They're terrific "Coming Attractions." Which is not to say that they don't do pretty well as *movies* too. —DON WILLIS

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Gish, Lillian. *The Movies, Mr. Griffith and Me.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983. Paper, $9.95. Reprint of the 1969 memoir.

Ivens, Joris, and Robert Destanque. *Joris Ivens, ou La Mémoire d'un Regard.* Editions BFB, 1982. Film-maker Joris Ivens has had an extraordinary career, climaxed by the twelve-hour 1976 film on China *How Yu-kong Moved Mountains.* In this autobiography, written in French (with Robert Destanque as co-author), Ivens, at age 80, looks back on more than fifty years of film-making—and on a commitment to socialism which has survived both his disillusionment with the Soviet Union and the vagaries of the Cultural Revolution in China. This is utterly fascinating reading; and, hopefully, it will soon be made available in an English translation. —JAMES ROY MacBEAN

Lenburg, Jeff. *Dudley Moore: An Informal Biography.* New York: Putnam. 1983. $9.95 paper. This is a moderately gushy star bio, but good comics are not exactly thick on the ground, and Moore has done some remarkable work, to which Lenburg provides the usual gossipy background. —E.C.

Passingham, Kenneth. *Sean Connery.* New York: St. Martin's, 1983. $9.95. hardcover. Though Passingham's biography tells us about Sean Connery's rise from an Edinburgh tenement to his superstar status, he doesn't offer much insight into the man who made James Bond a household name. Most of the book concerns Connery's volatile relationship with the producers of the Bond films, and is tempered with only a sample of his other pursuits. —SUSAN SITKIN

Redgrave, Michael. *In My Mind's I.* New York: Viking Press, 1983. $17.95. Redgrave comes from a theatrical family, and has a nice way with an anecdote (such as how he inadvertently turned off Garbo); into the interstices of the usual star autobiography he manages to insert many telling little details of performances, mostly on the stage. —E.C.

Rollins, Peter C. *Will Rogers: A Bio-Bibliography.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984. $35.00. A case for "intellectual montage" in the Oklahoma humorist—who, it turns out, almost had an audience with Trotsky. It was cancelled, but Rogers mused that he had never yet met a man he didn't like. Thus did the old Bolshevik inspire Rogers's most famous line. With a filmography of 69 short films. —E.C.

Strait, Raymond. *Alan Alda: A Biography.* New York: St. Martin's, 1983. $13.95. This is one of those star biographies that sound as if the author talked to everybody who ever knew the subject, read all the reviews, but never looked at any of the films. This is too bad, since Alda is not only an intriguing performer but (in *Four Seasons*) a promising director. Strait concentrates instead on Alda's growing fame, his political activity in behalf of ERA and feminism generally, and his lengthy and almost embarrassingly conventional marriage. —E.C.

Taylor, John Russell. *Alec Guinness: A Celebration.* Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown, 1984. $14.95. The great comic actor once remarked that his aim was "to enable audiences to enjoy life, or the better to endure it," and it is comforting to know that he must feel (at 70) that he has achieved it. Taylor provides a leisurely survey of his stage and screen career, with a few bits on his life. —E.C.

_____. *Ingrid Bergman.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984. $12.95. The much-beloved actress whose fans felt betrayed when she ran off with Rossellini always thought she could do "better later." Ingmar Bergman caught unknown elements of her real-life personality in *Autumn Sonata,* argues Taylor. Dying, she did a TV movie about Golda Meir, who died of the same disease. Taylor is sympathetic but not unctuous—on both her life and her films. —E.C.

Wansell, Geoffrey. *Haunted Idol: The Story of the Real Cary Grant.* New York: Morrow, 1984. $15.95. Carefully researached despite Grant's reluctance to cooperate, this biographical volume nicely complements Richard Schickel's critical study of the star's image as it evolved in the films. Much of the text focuses on Grant's complicated (and mostly unhappy) love life, but it also deals with his curious episode in LSD therapy and with the family whose tragedies arguably propelled him toward stardom—especially his "ferociously determined mother" to whom he was an "anxious-to-please son." Behind the relaxed control of the screen persona always lay the anxieties of Archie Leach, who had not really enjoyed being a movie star. —E.C.

Warren, Doug. *James Cagney: The Authorized Biography.* New York: St. Martin's, 1983. $14.95. The tough guy of the screen was also tough off it: he fought studio control over contract performers and won economic parity with other stars. Warren traces his rise from vaudeville obscurity, his lifelong marriage, his farm, but says very little about the making of his films. —E.C.

Criticism

REDISCOVERING FRENCH FILM

Edited by Mary Lea Bandy. Boston: Little, Brown/New York Graphic Society for the Museum of Modern Art, 1983. $14.95 paper.

Rediscovering French Film goes a long way toward filling a scandalous gap in current

film-book publishing: there has been no one-volume survey of French cinema (except for Sadoul's 1953 volume, available sporadically through Arno Press). Thiher's *The Cinematic Muse* is quirky and often illuminating, but is really only a "selected topics" essay book that bypasses the bulk of the country's production. Roy Armes's books are too narrowly auteurish and seem to spend all their time assigning grades to various directors. (Paris's *The Great French Films,* surprisingly helpful in its own way, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.) But where is the equivalent for France of *The Rise of the American Film,* or *The American Film Industry*? Up to now there has been nothing. The Museum of Modern Art has produced a beautiful and essential addition to any library of film books, public or private, and finally one can say that there is a convenient source-book to turn to in this field.

That is the good news. The bad news, in my opinion, is that it could have been done better. How much better probably depends on what exactly you want out of this sort of book. It is an anthology, first of all, and so there are ups and downs. Raymond Borde's essay on the thirties is a little masterpiece, and by itself justifies the price (reasonably low in any event, given the quality of printing, paper, and illustrations, and a stitched binding to boot). Also very useful are Dudley Andrew, two essays again on the thirties, and Jacques Siclier on the occupation. There are a number of helpful new translations of historically important texts by Gance, Feyder, Jaubert, Pagnol, Grémillon, Cocteau, and Bresson, though here my problems begin. Most of these texts are unbelievably truncated. Pagnol's "Cinématurgie de Paris" runs just over nine pages in Lapierre's *Anthologie du cinéma;* Mary Lea Bandy has chosen to present only the last 8% (!) of this text in *Rediscovering French Film.* Why bother? Why not have fewer texts and present them at greater length?

Perhaps the book is attempting to do too many things at once. There are: texts about whole periods, texts about particular film-makers, texts *by* film-makers, texts about particular films, and even one text on an actress (Arletty—so where are Gérard Philipe, Mosjoukin, and others that seem equally under-evaluated in English?). Doing less would probably have meant doing better. I also feel that too many of the texts that are included do not really carry their own weight. This is, alas, the classic problem of anthologies, and I will not bother to give my list of reservations, since everyone will have his or her own.

But to me, the greatest peculiarity of *Rediscovering French Film* is the anti-university and perhaps even anti-*scholarly* bias present throughout not so much in what is included as in what is not. Dudley Andrew is the token full-time professor; other authors teach, of course, but are primarily known for their criticism, which has mainly appeared in non-scholarly contexts. Academics, freelance scholars, and graduate students could have contributed much more to the volume; among others, one could cite Richard Abel, whose book on "impressionist" cinema will appear shortly; Evelyn Erlich, who is putting the finishing touches on a book on "occupation" cinema; Stuart Liebman and Sandy Flitterman, authors of significant dissertations on Jean Epstein and on Dulac, Marie Epstein, and Varda. Often the editor seems deliberately to bypass recent scholarly work in favor of oldies but goodies, as with Iris Barry on Méliès (a good text, as far as it goes, but much more is known now—*44 years* later) or Lumière's "last interview" with Sadoul (where the old man makes many errors of fact, none of them identified here). Jacques Deslandes, for example, would have been a much better choice for these slots.

Still, it's a start, and with so much of this material unavailable in English, maybe it's the best start. This is, after all, a book designed to accompany a film exhibition (the series of the same name at MOMA was truly remarkable). Now, perhaps, someone will come along and ask Deslandes, Abel, and other of this volume's "structuring absences" to do something more ambitious: truly to "rediscover" French film, in the patient, thorough way that too few of this book's pieces attempt.

—ALAN WILLIAMS

CINEMA STYLISTS

By John Belton. Metuchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1983. $19.50.

From the outset, in his Introduction, John Belton makes the organizing stance of *Cinema*

film-book publishing: there has been no one-volume survey of French cinema (except for Sadoul's 1953 volume, available sporadically through Arno Press). Thiher's *The Cinematic Muse* is quirky and often illuminating, but is really only a "selected topics" essay book that bypasses the bulk of the country's production. Roy Armes's books are too narrowly auteurish and seem to spend all their time assigning grades to various directors. (Paris's *The Great French Films,* surprisingly helpful in its own way, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.) But where is the equivalent for France of *The Rise of the American Film,* or *The American Film Industry*? Up to now there has been nothing. The Museum of Modern Art has produced a beautiful and essential addition to any library of film books, public or private, and finally one can say that there is a convenient source-book to turn to in this field.

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Stylists admirably clear. Revised auteurism—that is to say, non-vulgar and non-biographical auteurism, an auteurism brought more in line with the qualms of Barthes and Foucault (and subsequently Wollen) about authorship, and tempered with some of the notions about authorial presence in Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*—is the dominant (if not exclusive) mode in this collection of over three dozen pieces, written over the past fourteen years. With the specters and examples of Andrew Sarris and Robin Wood hovering over his shoulders—his right and left consciences, as it were—Belton lacks the stylistic fluidity of either of his mentors, but has certain sound academic virtues which match and occasionally surpass the capacities of both.

A champion of the underdog film as well as the neglected figure, Belton can be seen going to bat in *Cinema Stylists* for Robert Mulligan, Edgar G. Ulmer, Teresa Wright, Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn* and *Topaz,* Borzage's *I've Always Loved You* and even Preminger's *Rosebud.* (Which is not to say that more conventional topics—from Griffith and Hawks to John Wayne and James Stewart—aren't examined with equal discernment and scrutiny.)

Scrupulously alert to such matters as correct screen ratios, the importance of collaborators (yielding an interesting piece about Don Siegel, whom Belton terms "The Last of the Dependent Independents") and the interference of producers (as on *Shark!*), Belton remains a sort of liberal-minded traditionalist in most of his aesthetic positions. If he comes across as more strictly academic than either Wood or Sarris, there is a sureness about his steps, however plodding, which leads unerringly to whatever point he wishes to make. The physicality of Hawks, the spirituality of Borzage and the doom-ridden metaphysics of Ulmer are all constructed postulates of critical perception that lead Belton confidently through several essays, bringing coherence and shape to a great many local observations. (His more fragile and vulnerable treatment of Ulmer, rhetoric and all, closely resembles the passionate defense of Cornell Woolrich by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., in *Nightwebs* without being quite as biographical.)

In the midst of a polemic on Samuel Fuller, Belton sets down a particular credo that sheds considerable light on his own work as a whole:

> . . . If someone were to force me to classify my artistic tastes politically, I would have to confess that I love "reactionary" art; that I am drawn to art that looks backward, that reaffirms traditional values and beliefs in conventional forms. Though it makes no sense critically, I prefer Griffith's nineteenth-century, melodramatic vision to Eisenstein's twentieth-century, didactic one; Ford's collapse of events into the timeless order of memory to Capra's forward-looking, visionary utopianism; Hitchcock's profound, romantic fascination with the past to Kubrick's empty, futuristic cynicism. Yet an essentially irrelevant fondness for reactionary art on my part is not criticism but bias. It obscures the distinction that must be made and preserved between politics and cinema; as such, it threatens this article's first assumption that art is, finally, apolitical and that politics is not art.
>
> Griffith, Ford and Hitchcock are great not because of their affirmation of traditional values and beliefs but because of *the way in which they make* this affirmation. This is also true of Fuller. Although the content of his films is often political, his style transforms the politics into art.

Here, in a nutshell, are what might be regarded as Belton's strengths as well as limitations. As a frank and honest acknowledgement of an ideological tendency in much auteurist criticism (which made, for instance, American Ford criticism in the late sixties and early seventies one of the only plausible refuges for closet patriotism available), this is at once disarmingly American and, from an eighties vantage point, academically foolproof. (Incidentally, it also helps to account for the vantage point from which a *Car Wash* or *D.C. Cab* can be dismissed as message-ridden non-art, and a *Kramer vs. Kramer, My Dinner with André, E.T.,* or *Zelig* embraced as truthful art—namely, a class position.) It also exhibits the ability to call a spade a spade, a conscientious awareness of where certain contrary arguments lead (and a corresponding tact in judging how far to take them), a capacity to encapsulate a complex stylistic pattern in a simple phrase or concept, a decision to be precise and careful at all costs, and the academic assumption that criticism is neither art nor politics but applied theory.

For the most part, Belton is a critic of *découpage*—that is, *mise en scène* plus editing—and this is what basically guides and structures his detailed appreciations of *Le Boucher, The Crucified Lovers, True Heart Susie, Gun*

Crazy, I've Always Loved You and Hawks's *Monkey Business,* to cite only half a dozen of the better essays. His attempts to reach for wider social contexts—as in "Hawks, Warner Bros., and the War" and "The Backstage Musical: *42nd Street* and *French Cancan*"—are provocative but somewhat less certain forays into methodologically difficult areas. While I fully agree with the conclusion of the latter piece, that "Genre criticism needs to go beyond genre," I'm less persuaded by the position of virtual equality assigned to Bacon and Berkeley's likeable musical and Renoir's masterpiece, and even more dubious when Belton cites *7 Brides for 7 Brothers* (along with *West Side Story*) as a musical "shot outdoors," in opposition to "studio musicals" (which only proves that he's a sucker for painted backdrops). The article on Hawks and Warner Brothers is first-rate as far as Belton takes it; but since most of the piece is about Hawks rather than Warner Brothers, the degree of modified auteurism that emerges—as opposed to old-fashioned, personality-cult auteurism—is relatively slim. But the amount of solid, workmanlike close analysis in this collection is impressive as well as directly useful, and it is hard to think of another volume from Scarecrow that I could recommend as highly. —JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

NAPOLEON: ABEL GANCE'S CLASSIC FILM

By Kevin Brownlow. New York: Knopf, 1983. Paperback; $14.95.

Brownlow's book is as much a memoir of his own involvement in the restoration of Gance's epic film as it is an account of how the film itself came into being. This conjuncture is not accidental. Brownlow clearly identifies with Gance's view of the artist as Promethean figure: he idolizes Gance just as Gance idealizes Napoleon. (Brownlow provides many interesting vignettes in this regard, including the occasional tendency of Gance's cast to make slip-of-the-tongue references to him as "Napoleon.") Heroic rhetoric abounds in this book, and virtually every act significant to *Napoleon*'s creation and reconstruction is described in hyperbolic language. Carmine Coppola's score (one of the weakest elements of the restored version now popular throughout the world) is spoken of as a "titanic" achievement.

None of this is very surprising, since Brownlow's dedication to his task is now well-known. The book itself is an important contribution, going to some length to discuss the casting of Albert Dieudonné; the technical, financial, and strategic problems encountered; the failure of Gance's dream to produce a six-part epic; the original dismissal of *Napoleon* in the United States. Especially interesting in its historical significance is Brownlow's scene-by-scene description of the film's production, beginning in January, 1925.

Most film scholars are by now aware that *Napoleon* has existed in several versions, including the much-criticized *Bonaparte and the Revolution,* the nearly five-hour reworking of the film with a dubbed sound track. There were other versions, but *Bonaparte* was the one familiar to American audiences before Brownlow's effort, brought to the general public by Francis Coppola. An interesting note here is that the "Coppola version," premiered in America at Radio City Music Hall, is by no means the complete film. Brownlow's account makes it obvious that some of the more intimate dramatic scenes were sacrificed in favor of spectacle. Among the scenes are more detailed delineations of Marat (played by Antonin Artaud—one of Gance's greatest coups) and other leaders of the Convention, and a particularly poetic image where Napoleon returns to his home in Corsica to be surrounded by a halo of bees. *Napoleon* obviously had to be made a salable commodity reasonably safe with the American audience; the hoopla and almost religious fervor surrounding the Radio City showings (which Brownlow describes down to the tear-filled telephone call to Gance from the theatre stage on the evening of the première) submerges the fact that the "complete" *Napoleon* has not yet appeared, and that additional work might still be done—one positive step would be to change the musical score.

The Gance/Brownlow enterprise is a naive but time-honored one, viewing the work of art as Holy Grail, as spiritual essence just out of reach. This is perhaps more apparent in Brownlow's "pursuit" of the film than in Gance's creation, but the two share equal affinities. Brownlow describes how Gance mesmerized

Crazy, I've Always Loved You and Hawks's *Monkey Business,* to cite only half a dozen of the better essays. His attempts to reach for wider social contexts—as in "Hawks, Warner Bros., and the War" and "The Backstage Musical: *42nd Street* and *French Cancan*"—are provocative but somewhat less certain forays into methodologically difficult areas. While I fully agree with the conclusion of the latter piece, that "Genre criticism needs to go beyond genre," I'm less persuaded by the position of virtual equality assigned to Bacon and Berkeley's likeable musical and Renoir's masterpiece, and even more dubious when Belton cites *7 Brides for 7 Brothers* (along with *West Side Story*) as a musical "shot outdoors," in opposition to "studio musicals" (which only proves that he's a sucker for painted backdrops). The article on Hawks and Warner Brothers is first-rate as far as Belton takes it; but since most of the piece is about Hawks rather than Warner Brothers, the degree of modified auteurism that emerges—as opposed to old-fashioned, personality-cult auteurism—is relatively slim. But the amount of solid, workmanlike close analysis in this collection is impressive as well as directly useful, and it is hard to think of another volume from Scarecrow that I could recommend as highly. —JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

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his cast when he directed the "La Marseillaise" scene; the divine authority of the artist is repeated in Brownlow's account of how six thousand people were galvanized at Radio City. Brownlow suggests that film audiences, conditioned by television, by the experience of the cubicle theater, and by the mediocre condition of cinema, can be reminded of art-as-mass-ritual only by works such as *Napoleon.* Ideological criticism might illuminate the *Napoleon* phenomenon (Peter Pappas has attempted this in *Cineaste,* XI, 2) and structural anthropology and mythopoeics might be brought to bear as well. Gance's epic is a milestone in film history, and its maintenance as a cultural product constitutes a compelling moment in an age of "no more masterpieces." Brownlow's book is an unusual spotlight on both the film and its historical relevance.

—CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

THIRD CINEMA IN THE THIRD WORLD
The Aesthetics of Liberation

By Teshome H. Gabriel. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982. $39.95.

Since the rise of interest in films from the Third World in the early seventies, most of the English language criticism and scholarship has appeared in periodicals, such as JUMP CUT, *Cineaste, Film Quarterly,* the former *Cinetracts,* and, in England, *Framework* and most recently *Screen.* It has also appeared in obscure scholarly journals and monographs from universities and libraries. This is a highly varied body of work, ranging from short reviews to long scholarly articles. Only a few books have appeared and none attempts to introduce or summarize this body of film or develop a theory or method for studying them.

Teshome Gabriel does just this and much more. He moves the discussion ahead by developing an integrated approach to this whole body of work. By drawing in the thinking of political theorists, such as Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, and the film-makers' own discussions of their work, he puts the films in a clear Third World perspective. I particularly appreciate this book because Gabriel's years of teaching Third World film at UCLA have given him a pedagogical method that comes through very clearly. Teachers will find a lot here that they can use. I only regret that the price tag will prevent wide use in the classroom.

Like many of us recently, Gabriel is dissatisfied with the very broad geographic and/or racial category: Third World Film. He uses the term "Third Cinema," borrowed from Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's article, "Towards a Third Cinema," to set up a category of socially conscious films, which he sees as the most politically and aesthetically advanced and therefore the most interesting to study and discuss, whatever their geographic origins.

> This new cinematic movement, called 'Third Cinema,' was built on the rejection of the concepts and propositions of traditional cinema, as represented by Hollywood. The main aim of Third Cinema is to immerse itself in the lives and struggles of the peoples of the Third World. Since the Third World should not continue to dissipate its culture and national identity, Third Cinema attempts to check this and conserve what is left (p. xi).

Third Cinema is revolutionary, subversive, didactic, use- and user-oriented. It reflects and participates in the "traumatic changes that are engulfing the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America." It does not want to "re-aestheticize traditional cinematic codes but to politicize cinema to such an extent that a new cinematic code appropriate to its needs is established" (p. xi). In developing an integrated approach to Third World films, Gabriel argues basically that there are left-wing, socialist Third World films which serve the broad masses of people as opposed to others that are bourgeois, serving only a small elite. He analyzes many films from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to develop his approach. His deeply felt empathy for the struggles of the Third World artist and thorough understanding of Third World cultural codes makes his book extremely valuable reading. He explains the great relevance of political thinkers such as Fanon and Cabral. He also examines very carefully the ideas of such film-makers as Ousmane Sembene, Jorge Sanjines, Miguel Littín, and Solanas and Getino.

Gabriel is at his best discussing individual films and the films' interaction with their political and cultural context. I especially like his discussion of why the Chinese felt so betrayed by Antonioni's *China* and why their response so shocked the film-maker, who felt he had made a sympathetic film. In an intriguing parallel with Umberto Eco's analysis, Gabriel points out that what appear to be

his cast when he directed the "La Marseillaise" scene; the divine authority of the artist is repeated in Brownlow's account of how six thousand people were galvanized at Radio City. Brownlow suggests that film audiences, conditioned by television, by the experience of the cubicle theater, and by the mediocre condition of cinema, can be reminded of art-as-mass-ritual only by works such as *Napoleon.* Ideological criticism might illuminate the *Napoleon* phenomenon (Peter Pappas has attempted this in *Cineaste,* XI, 2) and structural anthropology and mythopoeics might be brought to bear as well. Gance's epic is a milestone in film history, and its maintenance as a cultural product constitutes a compelling moment in an age of "no more masterpieces." Brownlow's book is an unusual spotlight on both the film and its historical relevance.

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minor differences in style took on enormous ideological meaning. Antonioni's use of "pale" colors, a participatory camera style, and close-ups clashed with the Chinese desire for bright colors, a static camera style, and medium shots—Chinese stylistic concerns inseparable from the ideology of their revolution.

Continuing his concern to illuminate cross-cultural problems, Gabriel compares Tomas Gutierrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment* with the existential films of Fellini and Antonioni. Many bourgeois critics and even some leftist critics equated them, missing the fundamental differences. "The great importance of *Memories of Underdevelopment* is its revelation that Sergio's impotence stems from his inability to participate actively in a collective socialist struggle. Class consciousness demands more than the intellectual grasp of theoretical concepts which Sergio has attained" (p. 73). Cuba's new socialist order has left Sergio behind, whereas Fellini and Antonioni's characters lead the way to bourgeois decadence.

These interesting cross-cultural comparisons reveal Gabriel's years of teaching at UCLA, where he inspired several generations of black, Latino, and Asian-America filmmakers. He compares films which treat the same subject from very different ideological positions as a way of showing the interrelationship between style and ideology. For example, discussing two documentaries about South Africa, he uses a schematic table to contrast their camera style, narration, lighting, editing, color, and intended audience. He shows how the style of each film corresponds not only to the overt intent of the film, but also to the film's ideology. He develops this method in discussing two films on the Bay of Pigs invasion, three films on the Mexican Revolution, and comparing Miguel Littín's *El Chacal de Nahueltoro* and Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados.*

While the book makes interesting, valuable, and provocative reading for anyone interested in Third World film, it also has its flaws. Too often, I think, Gabriel sets up polar opposites and then, while acknowledging the dialectical connection, ends up embracing one of the poles. In his theoretical chapter he contrasts semiotics, especially as presented by Roland Barthes, Terry Eagelton, and Louis Althusser, with the Third World political theory of Fanon and Cabral. He finds, on the basis of far too little evidence, that the latter offer *the* way to approach Third Cinema (cinema in general?). I think it is a mistake to put it this way. Unquestionably, Fanon and Cabral are required reading for anyone who wants to deal seriously with Third World film. But many excellent analyses of individual Third World films have been based on a knowledge of the Third World context *and* on an understanding of and a clear use of the insights of semiotics and structuralism: Mraz on *Lucía* (*JC,* No. 22), Julianne Burton on *Chuquiago* (*Cineaste,* Spring, 1979), Anna Marie Taylor on *Lucía* (*Film Quarterly,* Winter-Spring, 1975), and Gabriel on *Xala* (in this book). While First World critics and scholars who hope to contribute to the discussion of Third World film must immerse themselves in the works of such thinkers as Fanon, Cabral, Wa Thiong'o, C.L.R. James, Garcia Espinosa, Solanas and Getino, Thomas Gutierrez Alea, Ousmane Sembene, Jorge Sanjines, Mrinal Sen, Paulo Freire, as well as Third World history, culture, and politics, Third World critics also have something to learn from semiotics and structuralism.

I have difficulties with Gabriel's definition, development, and use of the term Third Cinema to indicate a group of films he likes. First, its source is politically and theoretically suspect. *Hour of the Furnaces,* the brilliant experimental film Solanas and Getino made to illustrate their ideas, was in fact a campaign piece for Juan Peron, whose fascist leanings came painfully to the fore when he returned to Argentina from Spanish exile in 1973—a connection which any user of their terminology has to deal with.

Then, if there is no real political difference between First and Second cinema, why do we need to continue the distinction? As Gabriel's title suggests—*Third Cinema* in *the Third World*—Third Cinema can exist anywhere. In the Third World it expresses a specifically Third World left perspective which he sees as different from that put forward in Europe and North America. He is right about that; but since Third Cinema is not an exclusively Third World phenomenon, the term doesn't solve the problem.

Further, once Gabriel labels a film Third Cinema, he treats it as practically above political criticism. Yet many of the films used as examples in the book have political problems. I am not just thinking of their sexism, which Gabriel unfortunately glosses over. There are nationalism, religious mysticism, infantile leftism, obscurantism, military chauvinism. We need to approach all films with specific politico-aesthetic criteria which include an understanding of the film-maker's *specific* context.

Gabriel doesn't actually use political criteria beyond a general left-wing nationalism and anti-imperialism. Yet these are often in conflict—as Sembene so nicely shows us in many of his films. Often developing a national consciousness might be most important (for example, in Africa where colonial boundaries ignored tribal, ethnic, and linguistic divisions; Fanon, however, warned Africa against this nationalism). In other cases, nationalism might serve regressive purposes (for example, in Latin America where nationalism denies ethnic and linguistic homogeneity—and has often tended toward fascism). Race and class comprise another major issue. Gabriel does show how Sembene and Sanjines both deal intelligently and sensitively with this issue, but he does not go any further with it.

A major theme, of enormous importance in Third World films, is how film-makers portray the penetration of capitalist relations into precapitalist rural life. How can/does a Third World artist portray this transition in all its brutality, preserving the positive aspects of the old communal relations without romanticizing them? (Sembene does this better than any film-maker I know of in his novel *God's Bits of Wood.*) In summary, I think Gabriel (and the rest of us) have to go further and match up a Marxist analysis of social change (an analysis adapted to Third World realities) with a Marxist cultural analysis. Otherwise we run the risk, which Gabriel encourages while actually avoiding it himself, of uncritically romanticizing all opposition culture.

I have other arguments with Gabriel and that is what I like about the book—it provokes thinking and debate about many terms, notions, and approaches too long taken for granted. Our small group of North American and European critics and scholars concerned about Third World film have tended our own gardens and avoided debate in the interest of unity. Gabriel explodes our complacency in the best possible way and we owe him a debt of gratitude for doing that.

The book, as we have come to expect from publishing these days, is very poorly edited. Typos and avoidable language problems abound. There are too many inconsistencies and contradictions in scholarship. And the footnotes are very poorly documented. The book should have included the distributors of the listed films, even if this information goes out of date. It gives readers a way to pursue a film that interests them. All in all, though, Gabriel's book is must reading for anyone interested in Third World film. —JOHN HESS

LANGUAGES OF REVOLT
Dada and Surrealist Literature and Film

By Inez Hedges. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1983. $25.00.

Hedges's method is to identify Dada and surrealist strategies by describing literature and film (Buñuel, Clair, Artaud) as unpredictable variations playing against "frames." Frames serve as containing metaphors overall, trustworthy reference points linking the artwork to the audience. In the case of film, they also rest on the stability of narrative convention. The most common metaphors are alchemy, art object as a mechanical process, and equations of orthodox attitudes with conventional sight, i.e., bourgeois perception.

Hedges largely builds her argument with examples from André Breton's writing, collages of Max Ernst, and theories of Antonin Artaud. Her case climaxes in a computer-generated program designed to produce surrealist texts with surrealist metaphor as a model. For the film student, interest rests heavily on Hedges's readings of *The Sea Shell and the Clergyman* and on Buñuel's first two films.

In the Artaud film (executed, she says, by Germaine Dulac although film histories seem often to reverse degrees of authority in the credits), the author locates undergirding alchemical symbols and motifs. When first introduced, the clergyman pours black liquid from a scallop shell into test tubes. Traditionally, the scallop shell "is the consecrated receptacle

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of the alchemical liquid." A military officer (Mars in alchemical mythology, associated with air and fire) enters. He levitates and splits the sea shell with a flashing sword, separating the elements, etc.

The notion of launching surrealist surprises against middle-class expectations, twisted hither and yon through juxtaposition and dislocution, is of course common. Hedges's strength rests in her familiarity with all the work and also with ancillary experiments, so that, for example, she positions *Un Chien andalou* both as a response to French conventions of *cinéma pûr* and as a play on orthodoxies of popular movie storytelling. Described first in fairly typical fashion (Durgnat's reading seems to me the more challenging), Hedges returns to *Un Chien andalou* later to argue for more interpretations based on the Buñuel-Dali script. She connects the famous, recurring diagonally-striped box (*boîte*) with a "passionate lame man" (*le boiteux passionné*) who receives far more attention on paper than in the film itself. He is supposed to intervene at the end of the park scene, when the young man falls, dying, his hand grazing the woman's bare back.

Hedges identifies the lame man as Oedipus (three legs from the sphinx's riddle), alerting us to pervasive elements of psychoanalytic Oedipal fantasy such as the murder of the authority figure, blindness, and sexual rivalry. By such means the film realizes surrealism's intentions to transmit unconscious thought with maximum authenticity.

Hedges describes sound usages in *L'Age d'or* with skill and imagination. She pinpoints ironic relationships operating between images and music titles: Mendelssohn's "Italian Symphony" with the Vatican shots, for example, and Debussy's "La Mer est plus belle" when the bandits expire before they can meet the Majorcan shore landing. Pointing to Max Ernst as leader of the islanders (armed with accordions, hippopotami, keys, paintbrushes) she equates them with the artist's attacks on society—although if this is the case, their disastrous collapse is hardly reassuring.

Finally Hedges examines recent writing which furthers the Dada-surrealist impulse. One author is Maurice Roche, whose experiments in language she equates with Eisenstein's descriptions of hieroglyph combinations in order to illustrate image relationships. Sergei Mikhailovich might fidget at such company (depending perhaps on how closely the Congress on Film Matters was looking over his shoulder), but Hedges's arguable comparison underlines her success in locating film among a wealth of texts and references. Supported by many illustrations including some wonderful Ernst collages, *Language of Revolt* is rewarding reading. —JOHN FELL

INDELIBLE SHADOWS
Film and the Holocaust

By Annette Insdorf. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

From the onset of this carefully worded study, Annette Insdorf makes clear that hers is not just an exercise in film criticism, but an attempt to grapple with the legacy of the Holocaust. She is concerned with formal questions —"cinematic devices"—only insofar as they illuminate or evade what she sees as the moral imperative of all art that appropriates the Holocaust: to "keep it visible and render it meaningful." When confronting an event as unspeakable as the assault on European Jewry, cinematic technique is less important than an informed heart and a scrupulous regard for the historical record. *Indelible Shadows,* then, is "film scholarship tinged with moral concerns," a work that relies on words like "gravity," "enormity," and "responsibility" for its rhetorical power.

The experience of the Holocaust's Jewish victims has been explored in depth by virtually every major national cinema (the Soviet Union is a telling and conspicuous exception.) Eschewing a country-by-country rundown, Insdorf organizes her material into broad conceptual categories ("The Jew as Child," "The Condemned and the Doomed.") Throughout, she exhibits an abiding distrust of dramatic recreations of the Holocaust, no matter how well-intentioned. American film-making in particular is charged with a devotion to "cheap packaging" and "melodramatic cliches" that pre-empts truthful representations. Hollywood "high seriousness" like *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961), and the TV-movie *Holocaust* (1978) earns the author's pejorative of choice: "man-

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Insdorf reserves her highest approval for stark, understated documentaries, Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1948), Marcel Ophuls's *The Memory of Justice* (1976), and Peter Morley's *Kitty: Return to Auschwitz* (1980) being exemplary. The documentary's investigative tradition, its use of archival footage, and its reliance on the testimony of witnesses fosters a commitment to historical truth that the fiction film often sacrifices to dramatic necessities. For the author, indeed, documentaries "demonstrate that the facts of the Holocaust are richer than anything an artist could invent."

Insdorf's preference for documentaries hammers home her central argument. Though she attends to the purely visual aspects of film with precision, historical accuracy is the most important consideration when evaluating a Holocaust film. Fidelity to the historical record is what distinguishes the investigation undertaken by Resnais in *Night and Fog* (which she lauds) from that of Fassbinder in *Lili Marleen* (which she condemns.) Quoting Elie Wiesel, Insdorf warns that the Holocaust must never become "a phenomenon of superficiality," a public domain media-event to be molded and exploited for whatever purpose. The author abides by this mandate—and she expects film-makers to do likewise.

—TOM DOHERTY

WOMEN AND FILM: Both Sides of the Camera

By E. Ann Kaplan. New York: Methuen, 1983. $9.95

One of the few things that has continued to characterize contemporary feminist film criticism from its beginnings in the early seventies to its high visibility today is the vehemence of its supporters, who have attached themselves to its tenets with a growing and heady intellectualism. Feminist film criticism's embrace of a rarified blend of semiotics, structuralism and psychoanalysis, and the specialized vocabularies they entail, as well as its adoption of a canon of films, many of which are not readily available, tends to foster an uncomfortable feeling of exclusivity, leaving the uninitiated mired in unfamiliar catchwords and phrases, implicit assumptions, and stratified ideology.

E. Ann Kaplan's book provides a rigorous and readable introduction to the discipline. Born of an undergraduate course on images of women in film, Kaplan's book preserves the format of a textbook, interspersing explanation and analysis of key issues with extended application through lengthy analyses of individual films. Her pedagogic approach is reinforced by a selected glossary, an extended bibliography, and an appendix for teachers including a sample course syllabus.

Classical Hollywood cinema is a reflection of the patriarchy whose unconscious has locked images of women into projections of its own fears and desires. The construction of a masculine gaze within film structures the images of women as objects of that gaze (and thus of male desire) and positions women's images in patterns of gender-identified domination and submission. Thus, spectator pleasure is contingent upon identification with a male viewpoint, and much recent criticism in the discipline has addressed itself to the possibility of women's pleasure in the act of looking.

Kaplan's approach hinges on just this possibility. Identifying motherhood as that structuring of the female image which most exposes the contradiction contained within a patriarchal view of women, she argues that the image of woman positioned as object of the male gaze (and desire) represses her position as Mother—thus creating a tension, "leaving a gap not 'colonized' by man, through which, hopefully, woman can begin to create a discourse, a voice, a place for herself as subject" (p. 2).

Throughout the book Kaplan returns to her theme, building on the mother-daughter relationship first as it surfaces in classical narrative cinema (*Blonde Venus*) and later as it explodes in independent feminist film (*Nathalie Granger, Riddles of the Sphinx* and *Daughter Rite*). Clearly the repression of mothering by the patriarchy is a crucial component of its control, rendering the power of women's relationships to their children and to each other ineffectual by redefining and restructuring

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them through male centrality. Unfortunately an exploration of this theme also leads Kaplan to concentrate on the genre of melodrama where the mother-child relationship figures prominently. Kaplan argues convincingly that "women are excluded from the central role in the main, highly respected Hollywood genres; women, and female issues, are only central in the family melodrama" (p. 25). But in doing so she excludes a discussion of the ways in which generic expectations enforce women's marginality and function to seal the gaps through which a women's discourse might emerge. Thus Kaplan ends up giving her readers a rosier picture of the possibility of the liberation of the female image than she might have otherwise.

The strength of Kaplan's work lies in her discussion of feminist film theory. There is yet to appear in print a definitive dictionary of structuralism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis as applied to film.[1] Kaplan's glossary, the last ten pages of her extended introduction, wrests clear and concise explanations out of complex and confusing terms. Her definitions of "Lacan's Imaginary and Symbolic" and "Freud and the Oedipal Crisis" manage to avoid the self-referentiality characteristic of much psychoanalytic thought. Typical of her clarity and directness is her explanation of fetishism as "the perversion whereby men strive to discover the penis in woman in order to grant themselves erotic satisfaction (e.g., long hair, a shoe, or earring stand in for the penis)" (p. 14). My only argument with Kaplan here is that she doesn't do enough. I would like to have seen her turn her sights on masquerade, family romance, resistance, suture, hegemony.

The second half of Kaplan's book analyzes recent feminist film practice concentrating on films made by women which consciously attempt to redefine the female image on the screen. Gathering the major experimental and avant-garde films of the last decade together and analyzing them as a group yields some interesting conclusions, among them the possibility of a feminine discourse. The strongest chapter in this section may be the analysis of Duras's *Nathalie Granger* in which Kaplan argues that Duras uses silence "as a female strategy to counter the destructive male urge to articulate, analyze, dissect" (p. 95). Not as convincing is the chapter on discourse in the symbolic realm in Von Trotta's *Marianne and Juliane.* Kaplan concludes with analyses of difficult, experimental films such as *Riddles of the Sphinx, Dora,* and *Thriller,* three films frequently studied as examples of the avant-garde in courses on women and film throughout the country.

Kaplan's book has come under fire, unfairly I think, by critics who have seen her work as reductionist. It is what it was meant to be, an introduction to the discipline of feminist film criticism for students and others not previously "initiated," but it's also thought-provoking for those who have become deeply immersed in its doctrines. It is among the first introductory texts to have been written on the subject and because of its readability, clarity, and intellectual rigor, it may well set the standard as the introductory text in the field.

—KATHRYN KALINAK

1. Robert Burgoyne, Robert Stam, and Sandy Flitterman are currently at work on such a dictionary: *Film Semiotics: A Conceptual Dictionary* (Redgrave Publishing).

CINEMA EAST
A Critical Study of Major Japanese Films

By Keiko I. McDonald. Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983. $32.50.

Aside from the recent translation of Tadao Sato, most critical studies of Japanese films available to us have been by American or English critics. This volume, which is a modest but very carefully done series of critical essays, begins to redress this balance. (It is, paradoxically, dedicated to Donald Richie, and Richie's works are frequently referred to in the text.)

McDonald's contribution is more than simply to provide a more ample cultural background for the understanding of the dozen classic Japanese films she discusses (each in its own chapter). She also treats them with a sophisticated consciousness of point of view and other "rhetorical" features of their narrative structures, tracing the ways in which they build and guide viewer involvement in their stories. Occasionally this kind of analysis slips into the obvious: thus, of Noe (in *Eros Plus Massacre*) arriving on the modern bullet train, attired in a 1910-style costume, McDonald writes: "The brief projection of the Taishō

them through male centrality. Unfortunately an exploration of this theme also leads Kaplan to concentrate on the genre of melodrama where the mother-child relationship figures prominently. Kaplan argues convincingly that "women are excluded from the central role in the main, highly respected Hollywood genres; women, and female issues, are only central in the family melodrama" (p. 25). But in doing so she excludes a discussion of the ways in which generic expectations enforce women's marginality and function to seal the gaps through which a women's discourse might emerge. Thus Kaplan ends up giving her readers a rosier picture of the possibility of the liberation of the female image than she might have otherwise.

The strength of Kaplan's work lies in her discussion of feminist film theory. There is yet to appear in print a definitive dictionary of structuralism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis as applied to film.[1] Kaplan's glossary, the last ten pages of her extended introduction, wrests clear and concise explanations out of complex and confusing terms. Her definitions of "Lacan's Imaginary and Symbolic" and "Freud and the Oedipal Crisis" manage to avoid the self-referentiality characteristic of much psychoanalytic thought. Typical of her clarity and directness is her explanation of fetishism as "the perversion whereby men strive to discover the penis in woman in order to grant themselves erotic satisfaction (e.g., long hair, a shoe, or earring stand in for the penis)" (p. 14). My only argument with Kaplan here is that she doesn't do enough. I would like to have seen her turn her sights on masquerade, family romance, resistance, suture, hegemony.

The second half of Kaplan's book analyzes recent feminist film practice concentrating on films made by women which consciously attempt to redefine the female image on the screen. Gathering the major experimental and avant-garde films of the last decade together and analyzing them as a group yields some interesting conclusions, among them the possibility of a feminine discourse. The strongest chapter in this section may be the analysis of Duras's *Nathalie Granger* in which Kaplan argues that Duras uses silence "as a female strategy to counter the destructive male urge to articulate, analyze, dissect" (p. 95). Not as convincing is the chapter on discourse in the symbolic realm in Von Trotta's *Marianne and Juliane.* Kaplan concludes with analyses of difficult, experimental films such as *Riddles of the Sphinx, Dora,* and *Thriller,* three films frequently studied as examples of the avant-garde in courses on women and film throughout the country.

Kaplan's book has come under fire, unfairly I think, by critics who have seen her work as reductionist. It is what it was meant to be, an introduction to the discipline of feminist film criticism for students and others not previously "initiated," but it's also thought-provoking for those who have become deeply immersed in its doctrines. It is among the first introductory texts to have been written on the subject and because of its readability, clarity, and intellectual rigor, it may well set the standard as the introductory text in the field.

—KATHRYN KALINAK

1. Robert Burgoyne, Robert Stam, and Sandy Flitterman are currently at work on such a dictionary: *Film Semiotics: A Conceptual Dictionary* (Redgrave Publishing).

CINEMA EAST
A Critical Study of Major Japanese Films

By Keiko I. McDonald. Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983. $32.50.

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figure against the contemporary setting reminds us of the past and the present" (p. 178). But even on the most familiar of the films (*Rashomon,* say, or *Tokyo Story,* or *Ugetsu*) as well as on the more esoteric (*Odd Obsession* or *Twenty-four Eyes*) she offers intriguing observations; she has a great deal to say, for instance, about the subtleties of the sound track in *Ugetsu.* And, in what may be a rather Japanese way, she is not afraid to give terse statements of themes. This is a volume that can be read with profit by anyone with more than a passing interest in the Japanese film.

—E.C.

STAR MYTHS: SHOW-BUSINESS BIOGRAPHIES ON FILM

By Robert Milton Miller. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983. $27.50.

This is an overlength book confusedly organized, full of unresearched assertions and speculations, badly written, and concerning a subject already potentially tedious. So we had better begin with its several real virtues. It provides compact plot summaries of the many fictional theater and telefilms which adopt the narrative convention that they are retelling the life story of some figure in commercial entertainment: as performer, producer, scriptwriter, agent, etc. In theme, *Star Myths* makes an exhaustively illustrated case, out of Propp on the structure of the folktale, for the earlier, friendlier, less libelous film-bios of entertainers all having a basic rise-and-fall storyline. This single plot's moment of transcendence is not Boy Gets Girl but, customarily, a public certification of the commercial entertainer's cultural respectability. This can be a Carnegie Hall appearance, Cagney-Cohan's Medal of Honor, or showgirl Grable's social acceptance by her own upwardly mobile children. Agreed; and condensed and edited for style, *Star Myths* would find its happy academic home either in a popular-culture journal or even as a film institute mongraph, this latter a set-up which would suit Miller's large filmography. But in its present lengthy hardbound form, *Star Myths* is unreadable. And this is only one of its problems as an academic film study.

First, Miller's selection process: the industry in its appetite for pseudobiography doesn't isolate the entertainer bios from the others, the way Miller does. For example, the main connections, including economic connections, between Susan Hayward's 1955 film-life of the performer Lillian Roth and in 1958 of the non-performer Barbara Graham, are too close to justify Miller covering *I'll Cry Tomorrow* but not *I Want to Live!* This exclusion of lives of non-entertainers can only be a matter of page-space. Even odder theoretically is Miller's refusing elbow room to such film-lives as *All That Jazz* or *Citizen Kane* simply because fictional names are used for Fosse, Verdon, Hearst and Davies.

In other words, Miller is writing what mostly amounts to a study of the musical genre but in a way that concentrates on its least innovative subsection, and then in turn on the hack scripts for these productions. (*Star Myths* covers releases from 1930 to 1981 but the material is mainly wrapped round an early treatment of MGM's friendly *Great Ziegfeld* [1936], counterpointed with a closing notice of an unfriendly 1978 telefilm on the same producer.) Except one Astaire, the Freed unit is practically excluded from the book. Technically, the musical biofilm was such a backwater that Miller cites *Gipsy* (1963), as the first in the genre to integrate its musical numbers systematically, get them off the stage. 1963!

Miller is too loyal to these scripts to amuse us by giving them the Golden Turkey send-up treatment. But he is otherwise remarkably disqualified for dealing with mostly musical films. (Critically he is winging it, since Arlene Croce, John Mueller and Alec Wilder are all omitted from his bibliography.) He has no discussion of the genre's special problems in pacing or staging. Totally forgotten films with interesting credits—Rains as Belasco in *Lady with Red Hair,* a 1952 Republic musical that turns out to be an Allen Dwan assignment—pry no retrospective review out of Miller. Dealing mostly with girlie shows, he only once notices how attractive an actress is (Bruce in *Ziegfeld*). He likes BMI-rock enough to say something about the music in reviewing recent films, but not critically—only in terms of mimetic sound tracks or how many gold albums Elvis accumulated. Finally, in a book about scripts, he ignores

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There is no other American playwright, or novelist, whom Hollywood has adapted so often for the screen. Aside from O'Neill's phenomenal success on the legitimate stage in the States, his plays were produced all over the world, and in addition he won the Nobel Prize. It is small wonder then that all O'Neill's plays were filmed. In addition, O'Neill's plays possess many cinematic qualities and that alone, besides their strong conflicts and deep psychological delineations, made them natural for screen adaptation.

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seem to have been written in two installments, the body of it having its origin in the 1980 conference, while the opening half dozen pages attempt to acknowledge subsequent developments. It is an awkward and unsatisfactory compromise, however. Merely paying lip service to the spectacular international successes of two new films from Eastern Europe—*Man of Iron* and *Mephisto*—just isn't enough, especially not when one of them, Polish director Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Iron* (1981), is considered by many to be the most important and courageous film ever made in Eastern Europe.

Somewhere in this volume, someone should have been assigned the task of taking account of the quantum leap represented by Wajda's ability, in *Man of Iron,* to film history-in-the-making. If editor Paul didn't feel up to the task, then he should have prevailed upon Bolesław Michałek to do so in the chapter on Wajda he contributed to this book. Michałek, after all, is probably the world's leading authority on Wajda. He is the author of the excellent, although now badly dated, 1973 study, *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda* (now out of print); and, since the late seventies, Michałek has been a scriptwriting associate of Wajda's within the same "X" unit of Polish film production. Unfortunately, however, Michałek's chapter on Wajda seems to have been written *prior* to the making of *Man of Iron;* and although editorial effort has been made to update the argument to include passing reference to *Man of Iron,* the reader is still left waiting for an analysis that never materializes.

There are other gaps, to be sure. One would expect more extended treatment of the films of Krzysztof Zanussi. And one is surprised to find Roman Polanski figuring prominently in the introduction, then hardly dealt with in the body of the book. What *is* presented here certainly has much to recommend it, though, however much one might wish for more. Hungarian critic Yvette Biró offers, in what was the conference's opening paper, a provocative overview of East European cinema as divisible into two distinct postwar periods and moods. The first, characterized by the early films of Wajda and Jancsó, Biró identifies as marked by the pathos of overreaching historical ambition. In such films as *Kanal, Ashes and Diamonds, Landscape after Battle, Round-Up* and *The Red and the White,* to name only a few, there was a tendency, Biró argues, to posit as one's task the enormous challenge of confronting, understanding, and, perhaps, even overcoming history itself. The artists' conception of their task was herculean; it was, in Biró's words, nothing less than a "Faustian ambition to deal with unsolvable questions."

As the enormity of this task became felt, Biró argues, a second period of East European film-making began, in which the role of the film-maker came to be seen in more modest and ironic terms. Everyday life, with its minutiae of the mundane and trivial, rather than the world-historical, became the subject of films whose mood was one of irony rather than pathos. Biró sees this second period as ushered in by the so-called Czech New Wave, by films such as *Capricious Summer* and *Closely Watched Trains* by Jiri Menzel, the early films of Milos Forman (*Black Peter, Loves of a Blonde* and *Firemen's Ball*, and *Intimate Lighting* by Ivan Passer, as well as by the early films of Yugoslav film-maker Dusan Makavejev (*Man Is Not A Bird, Love Affair, or The Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* and *Innocence Unprotected*).

As seductive as this thesis might be, its sweeping periodization has its pitfalls, as Biró is the first to admit. Frantisek Daniel, in his contribution to this volume, argues that "The cinema of Czechoslovakia does not really fit the pattern described by a movement from pathos to irony, but rather the ironical element was always dominant and the pathetic element rather rare." Moreover, as Paul points out, film-makers like Wajda and Jancsó, the two leading examples of Biró's first period, have continued to focus up to today on many of the same broad concerns that defined their earlier works.

Where Jancsó is concerned, Graham Petrie contributes a chapter in which he defends the Hungarian director against the oft-heard charge that his career has steadily declined from a high point around 1967–8 (with films such as *The Red and the White, Silence and Cry* and *The Confrontation*) to increasingly trivial and decadent, primarily formalistic exercises with a steadily more obsessive erotic and even pornographic content. Petrie's case for a more judicious assessment of Jancsó's later work is well formulated; but, as he ac-

knowledges, there is unfortunately little likelihood that North American audiences will have an opportunity to see Jancsó's films of the seventies to judge for themselves.

Makavejev is covered in two chapters. One, by Lee Baxandall, presents a sympathetic summary of Makavejev's brand of "cinemarxism" (which Baxandall rightly sees as akin to Godard's yet uniquely Makavejev's own), but which Baxandall then attempts to link with his own quirky espousal of the international "naturist" movement. A second chapter, by Herbert Eagle, points out parallels between themes and motifs in Makavejev's films and the ideas of the Yugoslav *Praxis* philosophers and social scientists (whose best known member, to the west, is Milovan Djilas). Informative though these two chapters may be, neither breaks new ground, neither deals with the problems Makavejev has faced in trying to get financial backing since the controversial *Sweet Movie,* and, inexplicably (unless it is the timing problem again), neither even mentions Makavejev's latest film, Montenegro, which, although far more conventional than his earlier films, is hardly devoid of interest.

In what may be this volume's finest piece of critical writing, Antonín J. Liehm traces the trajectory of Milos Forman's career. Liehm provides a succinct, intelligent appraisal of the achievements of Forman's early Czech films, then proceeds to a judiciously more reserved appraisal of Forman's American films, leaving open-ended the directions his career may take in the future. Finally, David W. Paul and Rebecca Fox offer a chapter tracing the changing use of character-types in East European films, from the crude stereotypes of the "positive hero" in the Zhdanov tradition of Marxist aesthetics to the richer, more complex types found in today's films. The authors deal briefly with individual characters from a host of films, giving this chapter a catch-all quality. But even passing mention is better than none, especially of such noteworthy films as Vera Chytilová's innovative *Daisies* and *Something Different,* Pál Gábor's probing *Angi Vera,* Istvan Szabó's *Father,* Márta Mészáros's *Women,* Ewald Schorm's *Courage for Every Day,* Jan Němec's *The Party and the Guests,* Jaromil Jireš's *The Joke,* and Krzysztof Zanussi's *Family Life.*

A brief chapter on East European short films (especially animation) and a long, rambling chapter based on conference discussion round out this book, giving us the feeling that the conference itself was winding down by the time this material reached the agenda. The final chapter also manages to embody the anachronism factor of this book's timing problem: ostensibly the concluding discussion of the conference, it was clearly put together later by the editor, who, here at the end of the book, finally devotes a few paragraphs to *Man of Iron.* Overall, the conference itself was undoubtedly a stimulating event. As a book, however, this material suffers from its origin; and, yet, there are still enough glimmers of insight here and there to partially offset the lack of sustained argument and intellectual rigor. —JAMES ROY MacBEAN

FILM: THE FRONT LINE: 1983

By Jonathan Rosenbaum. Arden Press, 1127 Pennsylvania, Denver, CO 80203, 1983. $10.95.

With *Film: The Front Line,* Denver's Arden Press has taken a laudable step toward reestablishing a critical dialogue on the avant-garde cinema. It will be an annual publication, with each year's volume written by a critic opposed to the views of the previous author. Each volume will deal with the work of approximately 20 film-makers. In this format, the publishers hope to cover a wide range of critical responses to a body of work that has received inadequate attention in the past decade.

The author of the inaugural volume is Jonathan Rosenbaum, a freelance critic whose work has appeared in a variety of publications, from *Cahiers du Cinéma* to *Soho News.* Rosenbaum has been a New Yorker for the past eight years; before that he lived in London and Paris.

The eighteen film-makers he has chosen cover a great deal of terrain, both aesthetically and geographically. In terms of nationality, there are film-makers from Belgium, France, Germany, England, Canada and the United States. Aesthetically, he includes film-makers as diverse as Robert Breer and Chantal Akerman, Michael Snow and Beth and Scott B, Jonas Mekas and Jaques Rivette. Rosenbaum's pluralism is in marked contrast to two previous efforts in the field: P. Adams Sitney's *Vision-*

knowledges, there is unfortunately little likelihood that North American audiences will have an opportunity to see Jancsó's films of the seventies to judge for themselves.

Makavejev is covered in two chapters. One, by Lee Baxandall, presents a sympathetic summary of Makavejev's brand of "cinemarxism" (which Baxandall rightly sees as akin to Godard's yet uniquely Makavejev's own), but which Baxandall then attempts to link with his own quirky espousal of the international "naturist" movement. A second chapter, by Herbert Eagle, points out parallels between themes and motifs in Makavejev's films and the ideas of the Yugoslav *Praxis* philosophers and social scientists (whose best known member, to the west, is Milovan Djilas). Informative though these two chapters may be, neither breaks new ground, neither deals with the problems Makavejev has faced in trying to get financial backing since the controversial *Sweet Movie,* and, inexplicably (unless it is the timing problem again), neither even mentions Makavejev's latest film, Montenegro, which, although far more conventional than his earlier films, is hardly devoid of interest.

In what may be this volume's finest piece of critical writing, Antonín J. Liehm traces the trajectory of Milos Forman's career. Liehm provides a succinct, intelligent appraisal of the achievements of Forman's early Czech films, then proceeds to a judiciously more reserved appraisal of Forman's American films, leaving open-ended the directions his career may take in the future. Finally, David W. Paul and Rebecca Fox offer a chapter tracing the changing use of character-types in East European films, from the crude stereotypes of the "positive hero" in the Zhdanov tradition of Marxist aesthetics to the richer, more complex types found in today's films. The authors deal briefly with individual characters from a host of films, giving this chapter a catch-all quality. But even passing mention is better than none, especially of such noteworthy films as Vera Chytilová's innovative *Daisies* and *Something Different,* Pál Gábor's probing *Angi Vera,* Istvan Szabó's *Father,* Márta Mészáros's *Women,* Ewald Schorm's *Courage for Every Day,* Jan Němec's *The Party and the Guests,* Jaromil Jireš's *The Joke,* and Krzysztof Zanussi's *Family Life.*

A brief chapter on East European short films (especially animation) and a long, rambling chapter based on conference discussion round out this book, giving us the feeling that the conference itself was winding down by the time this material reached the agenda. The final chapter also manages to embody the anachronism factor of this book's timing problem: ostensibly the concluding discussion of the conference, it was clearly put together later by the editor, who, here at the end of the book, finally devotes a few paragraphs to *Man of Iron.* Overall, the conference itself was undoubtedly a stimulating event. As a book, however, this material suffers from its origin; and, yet, there are still enough glimmers of insight here and there to partially offset the lack of sustained argument and intellectual rigor. —JAMES ROY MacBEAN

FILM: THE FRONT LINE: 1983

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With *Film: The Front Line,* Denver's Arden Press has taken a laudable step toward reestablishing a critical dialogue on the avant-garde cinema. It will be an annual publication, with each year's volume written by a critic opposed to the views of the previous author. Each volume will deal with the work of approximately 20 film-makers. In this format, the publishers hope to cover a wide range of critical responses to a body of work that has received inadequate attention in the past decade.

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The eighteen film-makers he has chosen cover a great deal of terrain, both aesthetically and geographically. In terms of nationality, there are film-makers from Belgium, France, Germany, England, Canada and the United States. Aesthetically, he includes film-makers as diverse as Robert Breer and Chantal Akerman, Michael Snow and Beth and Scott B, Jonas Mekas and Jaques Rivette. Rosenbaum's pluralism is in marked contrast to two previous efforts in the field: P. Adams Sitney's *Vision-*

ary Film dealt only with the American avant-garde, and Malcolm Le Grice's *Abstract Film and Beyond* took an aggressive stand for European superiority.

Rosenbaum's approach is somewhat casual, based more on what he has seen and liked than on a comprehensive survey of the field. He writes with passion and discernment in a style that is personable and eminently readable. His enthusiasm for his particular favorites—chief among them are Straub/Huillet and Jacques Rivette—is contagious, and he analyzes acutely the strengths and weaknesses of film-makers toward whose work he is more ambivalent.

Rosenbaum's pluralistic, inclusive approach to the selection of the film-makers he deals with—perhaps the only approach to take at a time in the history of film when the term "avant-garde" is irrelevant if not meaningless —is offset by certain critical axioms that immerse an otherwise admirable book in a sea of contradictions. His sense of what makes a film avant-garde seems to depend chiefly on two postulates: first, that there is an inherent connection between avant-garde film and leftist politics, and second, that avant-garde is synonymous with "inadequately available." The first belief causes Rosenbaum to impose upon certain film-makers criteria that are not relevant to their work; the second reveals an uncomfortable bias behind Rosenbaum's apparently pluralistic aesthetic.

Interviews with Jonas Mekas and Peter Gidal bracket the book. Mekas, a film-maker as well as a passionate advocate of the avant-garde, offers apt criticisms of both of these problematic beliefs. To Rosenbaum's suggestion, in reference to Jacques Tati's *Parade,* that some films are avant-garde "precisely because they're overlooked or ignored," Mekas replies, "But not knowing that a certain film exists doesn't necessarily make that film avant-garde." A more telling exchange occurs a few pages later:

> JR: I'm disturbed about the way that an extreme right-winger like Paul Schrader can accommodate Michael Snow's films to his own philosophy.
> JM: Do you think you can make a film that can appeal only to democrats or Republicans?

To Mekas's first comment, Rosenbaum replies "True enough;" to the second, "Well, no." Curiously, through the entire course of the interview he doesn't really seem to respond to what Mekas is saying; instead, he follows his own train of thought and tries to drag Mekas along with him.

Rosenbaum conceives of the two interviews as "charging all the intervening chapters with [a] troubling and unresolved dialectic." He professes to admire Mekas's films more than his film theory, and Gidal's theory more than his films. In the Mekas interview, Rosenbaum disparages the proliferation of venues for avant-garde film exhibition that has occurred in New York. He obviously prefers the politically correct position of Gidal and the London Film Co-op, who favor a "central structure and a planned culture." Aside from Gidal, however, there are no British film-makers among the 18 Rosenbaum has elected to consider in depth, and none among the 22 he remarks upon more briefly in an appendix. On the other hand, there are several who work in the more chaotic environment of New York. This appears to suggest, as does Rosenbaum's comparison of Mekas and Gidal, that a politically correct position does not necessarily produce great works of cinema.

Clearly, Rosenbaum's "troubling and unresolved dialectic" is actually an inconsistency in his critical approach. He prefers James Benning's *One Way Boogie Woogie* to the later, overtly political *Him and Me,* but in an interview with Michael Snow, he spends so much time trying to inject Snow's work with a political import it doesn't possess that almost nothing of substance is said about the films themselves.

Not all of the film-makers Rosenbaum deals with in his book are as concerned as he with maintaining political boundaries. Marxist Jean-Marie Straub, the most deeply political film-maker in the book, has expressed his admiration for right-winger John Ford, whom he has called "the most Brechtian of directors."

In connection with the belief that inadequate distribution determines avant-garde-ness, Rosenbaum frequently bemoans the fact that certain films have not been distributed commercially. He says of Straub/Huillet's *From the Clouds to the Resistance:* "It should be stressed that this beautiful, intractable, 1979 Cézanne-like film is being distributed nontheatrically in the U.S. by New Yorker Films, and is not going to open here, perhaps not

ever." His syntax makes it clear that Rosenbaum finds this fact shocking, but his own description makes it perfectly understandable. Although Rosenbaum doubtless intends a compliment when he calls the film "intractable," this is clearly not a quality that a commercial distributor looks for in a film. It is one thing to say that, in an ideal world, many more people would see this film than have seen it; it is something else to ask a distributor to lose his shirt promoting it.

One is almost tempted to believe that Rosenbaum's often-repeated complaint that a particular film is not available stems from laziness. How else to account for the fact that a prominent critic of avant-garde film living in New York has not, by his own admission, seen much of the work of Ernie Gehr or Hollis Frampton, though he finds what he has seen interesting enough to include both film-makers in the book's appendix?

That the complaint comes up often in reference to European film-makers and much less frequently on behalf of Americans tells a good deal about Rosenbaum's personal bias. His ultimate compliment to an American film-maker is that he or she has the misfortune to be working on the wrong continent. For instance, his final word on Sara Driver reads, "It'll merely be our bad fortune if we have to cross the Atlantic to see her future work." Although he seems at first to be interested in breaking down the barriers that put film-makers like Jacques Rivette and Michael Snow in discrete pigeonholes, he merely erects another barrier between materialist, politically engaged Europe and idealist, transcendental America.

At the core of Rosenbaum's problem with the American avant-garde is its solipcism. He speaks, particularly in reference to Stan Brakhage, of male possessiveness and phallocentricity. He denounces films that center on "a boastful inventory of male possessions: This is my home, my dog, my flag, my Bolex, my woman, my art, my Louis Armstrong, my Shelley." Perhaps the book's most flagrant inconsistency is that Rosenbaum's own writing style is filled with equally self-indulgent anecdotal material. In the segment of the book devoted to Jonas Mekas's films, Rosenbaum discounts Mekas's self-avowed (American) influences, Thoreau and Brakhage, referring to substitute (Europeans) Tolstoy and Dovzhenko, thus replacing Jonas as he sees himself with "my [Rosenbaum's] Mekas." A further inconsistency appears in his chapter on Jackie Raynal, in which he wonders, "But isn't the camera a solipsistic instrument and moviegoing largely a masturbatory activity?" Apparently, what's good for the European gander is not good for the American goose.

If one considers only the film-makers Rosenbaum has chosen for the book, European superiority would seem undeniable. I have no difficulty acknowledging the superiority of Straub/Huillet over Benning, or of Rivette over Yvonne Rainer. It seems to me, however, that Rosenbaum has stacked the deck. Ernie Gehr, for instance, is a film-maker whose work does, I think, stand up to Straub/Huillet's; Rosenbaum refers to him as "another important structural film-maker whose work I scarcely know." If the book were as casually assembled as it pretends to be, with selections determined by no other considerations than personal taste and availability, such omissions would be less important. But given the slant toward a European leftist philosophy, made explicit in the comparison between Mekas and Gidal, Rosenbaum's choices become an issue.

I will not argue with the omission of Stan Brakhage, although Rosenbaum's attacks on him seem indefensible after he admits that he has not seen anything more recent than *Scenes From Under Childhood,* completed more than a decade ago (I do recommend that Rosenbaum take a look, at least, at *The Riddle of Lumen,* one of the most profoundly non-possessive films I can think of). In his antagonism, however, he might have made use of Owen Land, whose work consists in large part of an explicit attack on the whole notion of "personal film." Land rates a scant paragraph, in which Rosenbaum admits he hasn't seen his most recent film.

Future volumes of *Film: The Front Line* will probably redress some of Rosenbaum's omissions; even so, I can't help but be bothered by some of them. What about, for instance, Warren Sonbert, Chris Welsby and Marcel Hanoun? As for the choices that Rosenbaum did make, I'm willing to write off Ulrike Ottinger as a matter of taste, but can't help wondering whether the inclusion of Sara Driver was a bit premature. I have seen *You*

Are Not I (according to Rosenbaum, the only one of Driver's four films she is willing to show) more than once, and I am unable to see it as anything more than a promising student film. Rosenbaum's analysis, despite his invocation of Straub, Benning, Chris Marker, Antonioni, and Hitchcock, does not convince.

After all these gripes, I feel compelled to repeat that there is much to admire in Rosenbaum's book. His enthusiasm is to be prized in a field in which dry analysis has become the rule. When he gets down to particulars, his reading of the films is intelligent and stimulating. While I have found a great deal to argue with regarding his critical approach in general, I can't imagine a book on this subject with which I wouldn't disagree substantially. *Film: The Front Line* was, after all, designed to provoke a dialogue.

I will end by acknowledging that I would feel no need to be as critical as I have been if not for the dearth of serious writing on this subject. Most of the inadequacies I have complained of in Rosenbaum's book are inadequacies only because the book appears in the midst of a huge gap in film-critical writing, a gap too huge to be filled by a single volume. Arden Press is to be praised for its resolve to fill the gap, and Jonathan Rosenbaum for his bravery in being the first to move in.

—HARVEY NOSOWITZ

TWO ON GERMAN CINEMA

***The New German Cinema*, by John Sandford. New York: Da Capo Press, 1982.**

***New German Film: The Displaced Image* by Timothy Corrigan. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983. $19.95 cloth, $8.95 paper.**

The authors of these two books take very different approaches, conceptually and organizationally, to the subject of New German Cinema. John Sandford, whose pioneering study was first published in England in 1980 and reissued in America as a Da Capo paperback in 1982, offers an introductory survey approach, presenting brief but intelligent commentary on each and every film made by each of the seven "big name" German directors who have achieved an international reputation—Fassbinder, Herzog, Wenders, Schlöndorff, Syberberg, Straub and Kluge. Timothy Corrigan, while focusing on six of the same directors (he omits Straub), chooses to zero in on only one film from each director, and he examines how these allegedly representative films tend to be structured in relation to filmic conventions derived from American movies.

Sandford's book is something of a paradox. On one hand, it could easily be accused of spreading itself too thin, of too often presenting little more than plot summaries with only token critical commentary. And, yet, partly due to its comprehensiveness, but also because Sandford has done such an intelligent, insightful and lucidly argued piece of writing, his *New German Cinema* is an immensely useful work, one that will serve as the basic reference book on this subject at least until one of the other two or three books in progress on this subject appears.

The strengths and weaknesses of Sandford's approach are perhaps best exemplified in the long central chapter on Fassbinder. (Because of Fassbinder's prolific output, this chapter is three to four times longer than any other chapter—an imbalance which Sandford defends on grounds both of quantity and quality of Fassbinder's work.) Sandford plods tenaciously through summary accounts of each Fassbinder film, one by one, in chronological order, from the 1965 ten-minute short, *The City Tramp,* to the 1979 feature, *The Third Generation.* Fassbinder's death, in June, 1982, occurred well after Sandford's book was originally published, and he has not updated it for the American paperback edition; consequently, there is no coming to grips with the sudden end of Fassbinder's career, and no material on the post-1979 films *Lili Marleen, Lola, Veronika Voss, Querelle* or the monumental *Berlin Alexanderplatz.* What we do get, however, is an amazingly good sense of Fassbinder's overall development, of his stylistic strategies, and of the personal and political issues he explored. Covering 37 films in 40 pages, Sandford obviously cannot give an in-depth analysis of any one film; and yet, on a few films, such as *Katzelmacher, Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?,* and *Jailbait* (which he refers to by its British title, *Wild Game*), Sandford makes original contributions to the body of criticism on those films.

Sandford is also quite good on the films of Alexander Kluge. This is important, since Kluge is the least well-known abroad and the

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Sandford is also quite good on the films of Alexander Kluge. This is important, since Kluge is the least well-known abroad and the

least accessible to foreign audiences of the seven directors under consideration. Moreover, aside from covering each of Kluge's films, Sandford gives an informative account of Kluge's important theoretical writings. For Kluge, as for Brecht, Sandford argues, the emphasis is always on the *concrete,* on that which roots the audience's experience of the film (or play) in the *senses,* thus providing a springboard—or, in Kluge's term, a "climbing frame"—for the imagination.

Less satisfactory, perhaps—and certainly less sympathetic—is Sandford's chapter on the films made by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. Comparing the Brechtianism of Kluge's films with the different brand of Brechtianism offered by the Straubs' films, Sandford argues that "Kluge's films have a pace and variety, a rapidity and range of montage, and a wry irony that are far removed from the 'austerity' associated with much that Straub has done." Although Sandford respectfully acknowledges the deconstructive strategies behind the films of Straub-Huillet, he seems to find them unduly arid, esoteric and opaque.

On the controversial figure of Hans Jurgen Syberberg, Sandford is quite judicious in his appraisal. While duly noting Syberberg's propensity for self-pity and self-martyrdom, Sandford offers a perceptive account of the strengths and weaknesses of each of Syberberg's films. In addition, he offers an insightful summary of the aesthetics of Syberberg's fusion of Brecht and Wagner:

> a fusion, in other words, of the rational and Romantic traditions that have conventionally been regarded in German cultural history as polar opposites . . . a pairing that leads to what he has oxymoronically described as an "*aufklärerische Trance,*" an "enlightening trance," where the eighteenth-century rationalism of the *Aufklärung*—the Age of Enlightment—mingles with the mysticism of the nineteenth-century Romantics.

Where Wenders, Herzog and Schlöndorff are concerned, Sandford's survey approach seems to me less productive of original critical insights than in his chapters on the other directors. His Wenders chapter, in particular, strikes me as very pedestrian. On Herzog, Sandford offers succinct summaries of the films, and, occasionally, equally succinct critical judgments. He finds *Heart of Glass* "Herzog's least successful film," with a story he characterizes as "inconsequential, pretentious and frequently preposterous." Whether one agrees with Sandford or not, it is refreshing, for once, to find him venturing out of the merely descriptive mode and into the critically evaluative.

What is almost totally lacking, however, in Sandford's study of *The New German Cinema* are the critically analytical and theoretical dimensions of film criticism. These are huge and crucial gaps; and Sandford seems apologetic about them. In his preface, he acknowledges that "the approach to the individual directors is descriptive rather than evaluative. The virtues of the 'auteurist' approach are debatable, but . . . as an *introduction* to the New German Cinema, it is a particularly helpful way of coming to grips with the topic. . . ."

Well, yes and no. Sandford's comprehensiveness—at least where the seven "big name" directors are concerned—is his most helpful and strongest point. But his almost unrelievedly descriptive rather than evaluative or analytical mode is his weakest point. Even as auteurism it is weak, an auteurism at the introductory survey level, one that does not aspire to the in-depth analysis of how a given film fits into the rich thematic and structural variations of a director's overall *oeuvre.*

Finally, in reviewing a book whose strong point is its comprehensiveness, it must be noted that while the seven "big name" filmmakers are more than adequately covered, all the other contemporary West German filmmakers, less internationally famous but having made important contributions nonetheless, are given short shrift by Sandford. Lumped together in the final brief section of his book under the ill-advised heading "Peculiarities" are such film-makers as Helma Sanders, Sohrab Saless, Bernhard Sinkel, Peter Handke, Helke Sander, Hark Bohm, Erika Runge, Reinhard Hauff, Christian Ziewer, Helmuth Costard, and Margarethe von Trotte.

Turning now to Timothy Corrigan's book, we find that in many ways it is the inverse of John Sandford's. In *New German Film: The Displaced Image,* Corrigan announces an in-depth approach, foregoing any attempt at comprehensiveness, although in his critical agenda he focuses on films he believes are representative. His critical method is analytical and theoretical rather than merely descriptive and/or evaluative; and he mounts a gen-

eral argument regarding the inevitable confrontation with American film conventions which West German film-makers must make in creating their films.

All this is most promising. And, indeed, Corrigan's book contains a few very fine individual chapters, particularly on Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* and Syberberg's *Hitler.* Yet in its own way Corrigan's book, like Sandford's, does not consistently maintain itself at the higher levels of what it is trying to do, often lapsing into the more pedestrian areas of its particular approach.

Corrigan's opening chapter presents his general argument, and it begins with a 1976 quote by Wim Wenders, who, discussing the cultural schizophrenia that overwhelmed Germany after World War II, explained that "the need to forget 20 years created a hole, and people tried to cover this . . . in both senses . . . by assimilating American culture." In this historical situation, American movies, it is argued, had a profound impact on German culture. For Corrigan,

> Hollywood has been a primary focus for a double perspective on Germany: on the one hand, as an image of redemption and unparalleled technical proficiency and, on the other, as the propagator of ideological and economic imperialism. The double bind in this double perspective on America is the sociohistorical situation that underlies a large number of New German films. A double and contradictory movement, it is the impasse out of which German cinema has been able to emerge only by confronting it and making it an advantage.

Finally, giving his general argument its most convoluted twist—as well, I'm afraid, as its most convoluted syntax—Corrigan observes that

> I will argue here that what is said in many German films and how it is said are often the result of a history and industry whose contradictory machinery has become the formative means for articulating any single filmmaker's personal perspective.

This is unnecessarily ponderous and obscurantist. And although one might be tempted to lay the blame for such a style on the more notorious aspects of "Germanness," Corrigan, who is American, seems to have picked up the jargon of his critical style from the English and French semioticians whom he is fond of citing. In any case, put in clearer terms, Corrigan's general argument is simply that at many different levels of the film-making process, from production financing to distribution, from choice of subject matter to handling of narrative conventions, German film-makers inevitably come up against the American domination of the field.

This thesis, of course, is easy to demonstrate where Wim Wenders is concerned. Wenders has made the Americanization of German culture both the subject matter and the area of formal inquiry of most if not all of his films. Corrigan, predictably, turns first to Wenders when he begins tackling individual films by individual directors in an effort to flesh out his general argument. Devoting a chapter to *Kings of the Road,* Corrigan analyzes it as a self-reflexive variation on the American road film genre. After citing many long, dense passages from Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier* in an effort to establish what are the conventional spectatorial relations to such a narrative, Corrigan persuasively argues that "*Kings of the Road* endeavors to rework and challenge the ideal spectator that Metz describes by introducing, within the figure of the cinematic voyage, other figures which significantly change the nature of that voyage."

After Wenders, the next New German filmmaker to occupy Corrigan's scrutiny is Fassbinder, who, like Wenders, has explicitly expressed his own fascination with American movies as models for his own work. While a more logical choice, given Corrigan's thesis, might have been Fassbinder's *The American Soldier* (a pastiche on films of Howard Hawks and Raoul Walsh, among others), Corrigan opts for *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant.* I'm not sure how well this keenly analytic chapter fits in with Corrigan's general thesis, but in it he does a brilliant job of analyzing Fassbinder's use in this film of three distinct spatial planes, and of how this exploration of space disrupts, displaces, and comments upon the narrative. This is, I think, the definitive essay on *Petra von Kant.*

The next chapter, however, is perhaps Corrigan's weakest. Of the films of Volker Schlöndorff, he has inexplicably chosen to concentrate on the highly unrepresentative (and not all that interesting) *Coup de Grâce.* Corrigan argues that Schlöndorff, with his use of character types and the reverse-angle shot model, offers a "recontextualization of realism." And this, in turn, he asserts, borrowing an argument from Jurij Lotman's *Semiotics of Cinema,* becomes "information." The argument is a dubious one, and pedantic at best.

There follows an adequate, but somehow uninspiring chapter on Alexander Kluge's *Strongman Ferdinand.* This film, rarely seen in America, was so disappointingly received in West Germany that Kluge threatened to quit making feature films. Corrigan defends the film but fails to make us want to see it, or to convince us that we will enjoy it. Of the films of Werner Herzog, Corrigan gives a sympathetic reading of *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser.* Yet, somehow, in this chapter, as well as in the two preceding ones, his overall argument seems left by the wayside, and he tends to get bogged down in plot description and analysis of the individual films at hand.

In his excellent chapter on Syberberg's *Hitler,* however, the very density of this particular film enables Corrigan both to perform an in-depth analysis of the film and to pick up and develop the threads of the book's general argument. Even here, however, as well as in the brief concluding chapter (a cursory look at "alternative" paths explored by Werner Schroeter), Corrigan's general argument seems to have lost some of the compelling force it promised at the outset of the book. If I might make one final comparison between John Sandford's book on New German Cinema and Corrigan's, it could be said that Corrigan, who concentrates on in-depth studies of only a few films, sometimes has difficulty seeing the forest for the trees, while Sandford, who surveys everything, has difficulty seeing the trees for the forest. Nonetheless, each of these books is excellent in its own way. Taken together—and perhaps used that way as teaching texts—they complement each other extremely well.

—JAMES ROY MacBEAN

GOD BLESS YOU, BUFFALO BILL

By Wayne Michael Sarf. East Brunswick: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983. $27.50.

Wayne Michael Sarf takes a serious subject—Hollywood's portrayal of the history of the American West—and treats it in an irreverent and often silly manner. But at least he prepares us for what is to come from the start. The tone of the book is set by the opening quotation from literary critic Leslie Fiedler: "To understand the West as somehow a joke comes a little closer to getting it straight." And the joking mood is reinforced by the table of contents. Chapter 2, for example, which discusses the cinematic depiction of frontier sheriffs, is called "Trail of the Fighting Pimps," while Chapter 8, which recounts the Hollywood image of the Mexican, is entitled "Inedible Preserves; or Chili con Carnage."

When he is not being cute or clever Sarf is simply nasty, and often gratuitously; he calls Chilean poet Pablo Neruda "a pro-Soviet pimp" and names Lillian Hellman "an old semi-Stalinist." His criticism is almost entirely destructive, and he seems to feel that anyone connected with movies, from directors and producers to screenwriters and actors, deserves to be downgraded. Certainly Sarf is unhappy about the way Hollywood has depicted cowboys as well as Indians, outlaws and lawmen, Anglos and Latins. And he is disturbed that our movies have almost always gotten the little details wrong, that sheriffs don't wear the authentic suspenders they ought to wear, don't shoot the right guns, or sport the proper sombreros, even when the film-maker insists he has faithfully followed the historical record.

Sarf offers no sustained evaluation of the major movies about the West, but in passing he denigrates almost all of them. He dismisses *High Noon* as "totally phony," rejects Alan Ladd's performance in *Shane* as "ethereal," scoffs at *One-Eyed Jacks* as "long and expensive," calls *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* "silly," and observes that *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* is "truly awful." When it comes to *Viva Zapata* he just throws up his hands and admits "I don't like it much." Nowhere does he respect the Western as a genre with its own cinematic conventions and traditions.

In the battle between the film-makers and the historians Sarf seems to be on the side of the historians, but this is not entirely the case, especially when it comes to those historians who have tried to tell the story of frontier wars from the Indian perspective. So, Sarf accuses Mari Sandoz of being "guilty of covering up Indian atrocities," and he rejects Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* as "half truth, omission and outright fiction." Moreover, Sarf's own disregard for history is apparent in his decision to reject a chronologi-

There follows an adequate, but somehow uninspiring chapter on Alexander Kluge's *Strongman Ferdinand.* This film, rarely seen in America, was so disappointingly received in West Germany that Kluge threatened to quit making feature films. Corrigan defends the film but fails to make us want to see it, or to convince us that we will enjoy it. Of the films of Werner Herzog, Corrigan gives a sympathetic reading of *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser.* Yet, somehow, in this chapter, as well as in the two preceding ones, his overall argument seems left by the wayside, and he tends to get bogged down in plot description and analysis of the individual films at hand.

In his excellent chapter on Syberberg's *Hitler,* however, the very density of this particular film enables Corrigan both to perform an in-depth analysis of the film and to pick up and develop the threads of the book's general argument. Even here, however, as well as in the brief concluding chapter (a cursory look at "alternative" paths explored by Werner Schroeter), Corrigan's general argument seems to have lost some of the compelling force it promised at the outset of the book. If I might make one final comparison between John Sandford's book on New German Cinema and Corrigan's, it could be said that Corrigan, who concentrates on in-depth studies of only a few films, sometimes has difficulty seeing the forest for the trees, while Sandford, who surveys everything, has difficulty seeing the trees for the forest. Nonetheless, each of these books is excellent in its own way. Taken together—and perhaps used that way as teaching texts—they complement each other extremely well.

—JAMES ROY MacBEAN

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cal arrangement of his material. He jumps from decade to decade, backtracks, and gets sidetracked, fragmenting what could have been a fascinating narrative that describes the origins and development of the Western in the twentieth century. What the author offers instead is a pastiche of prejudices and peeves. Fans of cowboys pictures and historians of the West are not likely to be amused.

—JONAH RASKIN

MYTHMAKERS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

By Dr. Wiley Lee Umphlett. Lewisburg, PA.: Bucknell University Press, 1983, $40.00.

From the outset the good doctor dispenses with any soothing bedside manner by frankly discussing the causes, symptoms, and name of a disease that has distorted our eye sight. According to Umphlett, ". . . four forms of our popular culture—fiction, comic-strip art, movies, and television—have imperceptibly conditioned us over the years," creating our neurotic obsession for nostalgia. Unable to withstand the "psychic tension" of the surrounding world, we Americans cling to "the familiar objects, sights, and scenes of the past." Dr. Umphlett coins the term *nostalgia neurosis* to identify the neurotic state of anxiety "brought on by one's realization of the wide gulf separating the uncertainty of the present from the apparent harmony of the past."

As is so often the case with pseudo-Freudian theories on the inner workings of modernity, there are rarely exceptions to the formulaic diagnosis put forth. More plainly, Umphlett's *nostalgia neurosis* infects every aspect of American film. This one-dimensional, indiscriminate critical stance casts film-makers and film-goers into pathetic roles. The fallen, and falling, film-goer stumbles blindly into a warm, dark, padded theater unable to withstand the "extrapersonal influences" of the modern world. He soothes his bloodshot eyes by viewing numerous nostalgia-laden movies which pander to his insatiable need to recreate a harmonious American past. Similarly, filmmakers are capable only of producing movies that convey and promote this American neurosis.

What is most disturbing about *Mythmakers of the American Dream* is the conspicuous omission of both a prognosis and a prescription for *nostalgia neurosis*. After being told we suffer from this peculiarly American neurosis it is only reasonable to expect Dr. Umphlett to tell us how long he expects our limited vision to continue and/or what steps we might take to improve our health. Although the book begins with an informative introduction there is no effective concluding chapter or thought. Certainly he owes much more to his "patient" readers. Are we terminally ill? Should we indulge or disdain our thirst for nostalgia? If Dr. Umphlett is simply a diagnostician to whom now should we turn for help?

Perhaps this over-sized picture book, containing both a double-column narrative and numerous pictures, drawings, and comics, is meant only to be perused casually, say for example when one passes time in a doctor's waiting room. —CARL DOLAN

Agee, James. *Agee on Film, Vols. 1 and 2.* New York: Putnam, Wideview/Perigee Books. 1983. Each vol. $7.95 paper. Reprint of these essential documents in American film criticism.

Costello, Donald P. *Fellini's Road.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983. $16.95 cloth, $9.95 paper. Costello endeavors to piece together a comprehensive explanation of Fellini's directorial motives in four of his films: *La Strada, La Dolce Vita, 8½*, and *Juliet of the Spirits.* While the book provides a complete narrative of the films' plots, Costello seems to pull his analyses from a resolute portfolio of traditional Freudian psychology. The style of writing is reminiscent of what an eager college student would submit to a firmly dogmatic professor. —SUSAN SITKIN

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have done much better. With a nice sense of the historical realities that epics have played upon, Elley surveys Old and New Testament films, Greek and Roman epics, and works set in early medieval times. A terminal chapter ruminates on the epic legacy visible in Hong Kong martial arts films, Italian westerns, and a miscellany of recent films, closing with *2001*—juxtaposed to a quote from Vergil. Joins Jon Solomon's *Ancient World in the Cinema* to make two historically sophisticated treatments of epic film. —E.C.

Everson, William K. *The Films of Laurel and Hardy.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1983, $9.95. A reissue of the 1967 volume, a film-by-film account of the L&H canon. —E.C.

Griggs, John. *The Films of Gregory Peck.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1984. $19.95. A sketch of Peck's civic-minded life, followed by production stories (with credits and copious illustrations) for all his films. —E.C.

Hirsch, Foster. *Film Noir, The Dark Side of The Screen.* New York: Da Capo, 1981. $12.95. A paperback reissue.

Kael, Pauline. *Taking It All In.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984. $25.00 cloth, $14.95 paperback. This volume includes Kael's *New Yorker* columns from mid-1980 to mid-1983, not a bad period in her eyes. —E.C.

Molyneaux, Gerald, F.S.C. *Charles Chaplin's "City Lights."* New York: Garland Publishers, 1983. Dissertation on the production history of *City Lights* and the operations of its comedy. With a reconstructed script and bibliography. —E.C.

Paris, James Reid. *The Great French Films.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1983. $18.95. Fifty films are covered with full credits, "background" (mostly the director's career), plot summary, and commentary. There seem to be few if any errors, though film selection is limited: only two silents, no Grémillon, etc. Fifty more brief commentaries do a bit to remedy this failing. Mainly this is a picture book, and most of the stills are rare and beautiful. Very good of its kind. —ALAN WILLIAMS

Parrill, William. *The Films of Sam Peckinpah.* Minneapolis: Alpha Editions, 1983. This is a treatment of Peckinpah as a Hemingway-style artist, staunchly defending him against critics and offering detailed summaries of the plots of each film. —E.C.

Peary, Danny. *Cult Movies 2: 50 More of the Classics, the Sleepers, the Weird, and the Wonderful.* New York: Dell, 1983. $12.95. This second trip to the buffet table involves a surprisingly high proportion of good, healthy, normal roast-beef-and-potatoes fare (*The Big Heat, Children of Paradise, Last Tango in Paris, Marnie, My Darling Clementine, Sullivan's Travels, Wuthering Heights*) about which Peary has nothing especially memorable to say. The weird dishes you are not sure you can get (or keep) down include things like *Basket Case, Blood Feast, The Great Texas Dynamite Chase,* and *Massacre at Central High.* And then there is a large collection of good and interesting films which, luckily, have found devoted viewers and ought not to have to be plugged as cult works—unless film art as a whole has become a cult. —E.C.

Quirk, Lawrence J. *The Films of Gloria Swanson.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1984. $19.95. Swanson began at 15 in the Chicago studios of Essanay, and when she died the *New York Times* (perhaps in the thrall of *Sunset Boulevard*) called her "the greatest star of them all." Quirk is duly star-struck, and surveys her life and films with rapt attention. Copious illustrations, including some shots from Swanson's last years. —E.C.

Reader, Keith. *Cultures on Celluloid.* London, Melbourne, New York: Quartet Books, 1983. $24.95. Reader undertakes a sort of extension of the Wolfenstein & Leites national-cultures approach (they do not figure in his bibliography, however) into a more socially sophisticated methodology. The perils are many; he believes, for instance, that Hollywood has exemplified "the free-market model propounded by [Milton] Friedman," and sees the antitrust decree as restoring the temporarily abused rules of free competition; he thinks of the American South (at the time of *Birth of a Nation*) as exemplifying "quasi-feudal Luddism"); and he argues (without evidence) that Soviet films were perceived in Hollywood as serious competition. The great bulk of the book, however, is running commentary on a large number of interesting American, French, and British films treated under a loose intercultural perspective. One lengthy section on *Kind Hearts and Coronets* traces British strategies of "disavowal" of sexuality through the witty twists and turns of plot and dialogue, which soon gets to be rather too much. Citing the scene where the punt goes over the weir and Louis reflects that the girl "had presumably, during the weekend, already undergone a fate worse than death," Reader pronounces that this "fate is clearly connected with disagreeable sexual experience (the phrase tends to evoke pagan times of pillage and rapine, when the menfolk of the invaded communities would be barbarously put to death while the women suffer a fate deemed to be even worse), and—at its limits at any rate—the raping of a virgin. While there is no suggestion that the nameless female was hitherto a virgin . . ." and so on. He even seems to believe that "You're a lucky man, Lionel, take my word for it" must be understood as an allusion to much-cited sly remark by a bisexual Oxbridge don. On the whole, however, though Reader could have used a restraining editorial hand, he is entertaining even when excessive. —E.C.

Ricci, Mark, Boris Zmijewsky and Steve Zmijewsky. *The Complete Films of John Wayne.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1983. $19.95. Full-throttle idolatry in a brief introduction, followed by credits, synopses, and lots of reasonably well printed production stills. —E.C.

Silver, Alain. *The Samurai Film.* New York: Overlook/Viking, 1984. $17.95. A reissue, with corrections, of the 1977 volume.

Thomas, Tony. *The Films of Henry Fonda.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1983. $18.95. A biographical sketch plus credits and accounts of the making of each film, with ample photographs. —E.C.

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Toles, George E., Ed. *Film/Literature.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1983. $20.95 cloth, $14.95 paper. This is a book-length issue of the magazine *Mosaic;* contributors include many well-known critics (mostly American, with a few Canadians) and the topics cover a wide range. —E.C.

Youngkin, Stephen D., James Bigwood, and Raymond G. Cabana, Jr. *The Films of Peter Lorre.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1982. It's a matter of record, reiterated in this typically well-researched-and-designed Citadel special—Charlie Chaplin once called Peter Lorre "the greatest living actor." Quite a distance from such encomiums to the sad details in Youngkin's introductory biography here, which is a litany of professional frustrations and missed chances. And it's true that, in most of his movies, Lorre was not the star, but one of the supporting players. Even a "B" movie like *Think Fast, Mr. Moto* (1937), which features his name above the title, gives equal time to his bland co-stars. In *M,* as Beckert, his most famous role, he shares screen time with a host of cops and robbers—he is the "star" of, roughly, half the film. And in the one film which he directed, *Der Verlorene* (1951), Lorre the actor is allowed only scattered ironic asides with which to infuse his rather dour character with life. Lorre the director is too tactful, too restrained. Even Lorre diluted Lorre. Movies like the Mr. Moto series (1937-1939) were fashioned to market his charm as a personality. He spends much of his time as Moto simply smiling disarmingly, only occasionally dropping all pretenses at exotic charm and, abruptly, turning oddly cold, almost malefic. If such unexpected moments in his performance suggest that more may be going on than it seems, the moments pass. Mr. Moto is, basically, reassuringly domesticated Lorre. In his eight films with Sydney Greenstreet, Lorre's expressiveness as an actor wryly complements Greenstreet's forbidding expressionlessness, but, again, the two were generally only parts of an ensemble of Warners actors. Even *small* doses of Lorre, however, could sometimes be powerful. In his punctuating appearance in *Stranger on The Third Floor* (1940), for instance, he manages, in a matter of minutes, to suggest (as a psychopathic killer) a whole, lost, out-of-kilter world, one in which people are as evanescent as their emotions. Lorre further refines this world-in-a-character in *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1946), which features a most undomesticated Lorre as a madman obsessed with a living hand which isn't really there. *He* isn't really there either, having discovered an immaterial world of fear-and-loathing with claims on him stronger than those of the material world. . . . —DON WILLIS

Director Studies

THE LOOK OF BUSTER KEATON

By Robert Benayoun. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. $29.95.

This very handsome, oversize *hommage* to the great comedian (released in France last year) is more than another work of hagiography: it is an attempt to put Keaton in a cultural context and to show how his genius transcends the genre of comedy. In some respects this project is nothing new, since many critics (particularly in Europe) have attempted to portray the early silent comedians as avatars of the avant-garde, as kindred souls of the then-emerging Dada and Surrealist movements. Benayoun's work is certainly a gesture in this direction, with impressionistic but bold attempts to associate Keaton with Kafka, Duchamp, Magritte, and figures of nineteenth-century high culture such as Caspar David Fredrich.

What distinguishes this book is its emphasis on Keaton's grace and sheer physical beauty; in this it is a work long overdue. Benayoun demonstrates, principally through the solid evidence of stills, that Keaton's visage—hardly the "Great Stone Face"—is an American icon, as handsome as the chiseled American Gothic of Gary Cooper, as introspective and sensitive as Clift or Dean. Keaton's art was always involved with the primacy of the individual over both nature and culture, a typical preoccupation of American art. Indeed, the young Keaton's presence was as strong as evocation of Fenimore Cooper and frontier folklore as anything of our age; the figure of Keaton in *The General* could be a subject for Horatio Greenough, an idealization of the

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_____. *The Films of Olivia De Havilland.* New York: Citadel, 1983. $18.95. Credits, synopses, photos, brief commentaries. —E.C.

Toles, George E., Ed. *Film/Literature.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1983. $20.95 cloth, $14.95 paper. This is a book-length issue of the magazine *Mosaic;* contributors include many well-known critics (mostly American, with a few Canadians) and the topics cover a wide range. —E.C.

Youngkin, Stephen D., James Bigwood, and Raymond G. Cabana, Jr. *The Films of Peter Lorre.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1982. It's a matter of record, reiterated in this typically well-researched-and-designed Citadel special—Charlie Chaplin once called Peter Lorre "the greatest living actor." Quite a distance from such encomiums to the sad details in Youngkin's introductory biography here, which is a litany of professional frustrations and missed chances. And it's true that, in most of his movies, Lorre was not the star, but one of the supporting players. Even a "B" movie like *Think Fast, Mr. Moto* (1937), which features his name above the title, gives equal time to his bland co-stars. In *M,* as Beckert, his most famous role, he shares screen time with a host of cops and robbers—he is the "star" of, roughly, half the film. And in the one film which he directed, *Der Verlorene* (1951), Lorre the actor is allowed only scattered ironic asides with which to infuse his rather dour character with life. Lorre the director is too tactful, too restrained. Even Lorre diluted Lorre. Movies like the Mr. Moto series (1937-1939) were fashioned to market his charm as a personality. He spends much of his time as Moto simply smiling disarmingly, only occasionally dropping all pretenses at exotic charm and, abruptly, turning oddly cold, almost malefic. If such unexpected moments in his performance suggest that more may be going on than it seems, the moments pass. Mr. Moto is, basically, reassuringly domesticated Lorre. In his eight films with Sydney Greenstreet, Lorre's expressiveness as an actor wryly complements Greenstreet's forbidding expressionlessness, but, again, the two were generally only parts of an ensemble of Warners actors. Even *small* doses of Lorre, however, could sometimes be powerful. In his punctuating appearance in *Stranger on The Third Floor* (1940), for instance, he manages, in a matter of minutes, to suggest (as a psychopathic killer) a whole, lost, out-of-kilter world, one in which people are as evanescent as their emotions. Lorre further refines this world-in-a-character in *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1946), which features a most undomesticated Lorre as a madman obsessed with a living hand which isn't really there. *He* isn't really there either, having discovered an immaterial world of fear-and-loathing with claims on him stronger than those of the material world. . . . —DON WILLIS

Director Studies

THE LOOK OF BUSTER KEATON

By Robert Benayoun. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. $29.95.

This very handsome, oversize *hommage* to the great comedian (released in France last year) is more than another work of hagiography: it is an attempt to put Keaton in a cultural context and to show how his genius transcends the genre of comedy. In some respects this project is nothing new, since many critics (particularly in Europe) have attempted to portray the early silent comedians as avatars of the avant-garde, as kindred souls of the then-emerging Dada and Surrealist movements. Benayoun's work is certainly a gesture in this direction, with impressionistic but bold attempts to associate Keaton with Kafka, Duchamp, Magritte, and figures of nineteenth-century high culture such as Caspar David Fredrich.

What distinguishes this book is its emphasis on Keaton's grace and sheer physical beauty; in this it is a work long overdue. Benayoun demonstrates, principally through the solid evidence of stills, that Keaton's visage—hardly the "Great Stone Face"—is an American icon, as handsome as the chiseled American Gothic of Gary Cooper, as introspective and sensitive as Clift or Dean. Keaton's art was always involved with the primacy of the individual over both nature and culture, a typical preoccupation of American art. Indeed, the young Keaton's presence was as strong as evocation of Fenimore Cooper and frontier folklore as anything of our age; the figure of Keaton in *The General* could be a subject for Horatio Greenough, an idealization of the

American hero more compelling than any of the melodramatic fabrications produced by Griffith or Ford.

Benayoun's work eventually picks up the timeless Keaton–Chaplin debate. While Benayoun is too intelligent actually to take sides, it is clear that the valorization he undertakes is linked to his view of Keaton as "purer" artist. This too is not a new argument, but Benayoun's case is most convincing simply because he is not adamant and sees no real need to attack or defend either artist. It is apparent, however, that Benayoun sees Keaton as ennobled by his alcoholism and martyred by the studio system, the archetypal instance of the great artist, like Van Gogh, who withstood a soul-wrenching rite of purification. Unlike Chaplin, Keaton was not immediately embraced by the intelligentsia and international high society, nor was he especially interested in such flirtations (particularly after his first divorce and dismissal from MGM). Keaton was able to maintain his bemused detachment even when employed by Samuel Beckett and honored by the Cinémathèque Française (during the same period when he was degraded in beach party movies).

To the end of his life Keaton remained a tormented man, but always the humblest of artists, and it is to the idea of immense but naive, "saintly" genius that Benayoun pays tribute. It does not seem ironic that Buster Keaton, the artist more concerned with perfecting his craft than with discussing his cultural significance, should be idealized at the time of the "death of the subject" and the dimished primacy of the artist. Benayoun's book is thus far more than another auteurist validation of Keaton (such is hardly needed); it is a commemoration of the artist-as-hero, of an artistic ideal that is atavistic and hence all the more engaging in the midst of postmodernism. Keaton would have scratched his head in bewilderment, but just before being overwhelmed by this thoughtful, poetic testament. —CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

THE SHAPE OF RAGE
The Films of David Cronenberg

Edited by Piers Handling. New York: New York Zoetrope, 1983.

Canadian film-maker David Cronenberg may at first seem an unlikely candidate for the kind of full-dress critical treatment usually reserved for aging masters or pop-cult sensations. Cronenberg's seven theatrical features have met with such lukewarm response from reviewers and audiences alike that one can be forgiven for thinking that this provocative collection of essays (published with financial assistance from the Canada Council and the World Film Festival of Toronto, Inc.) looks suspiciously like a nationalist conspiracy to elevate an interesting but as yet minor talent into the heavyweight ranks. Acclaiming someone as the most "all-around 'important' director of feature films ever to emerge from English Canada" is faint praise given the caliber of the competition. Still, *They Came from Within* (1975), *Rabid* (1976), *The Brood* (1979), *Scanners* (1980), and *Videodrome* (1982) are undeniably as consistent in their thematic concerns as they are inventive in their graphic rendering of same. More to the point, perhaps, is the belief that any director who has had occasion to endow Marilyn Chambers's armpit with a phallic spike and James Woods's stomach with a vaginal slit is definitely a force to be reckoned with in world cinema.

In method and quality, the essays are a mixed bag, but taken together they make a strong case for Cronenberg as the possessor of what critic Tim Lucas calls a "fluid uniformity of vision" that represents "one of the truest oeuvres that the fantastic has ever known." The oxymoronical title of William Beard's comprehensive introductory piece, "The Visceral Mind," captures the general critical drift: that Cronenberg's horror films are serious meditations on Cartesian mind-body duality, simultaneously drawn to and repulsed by "the dangers of the explosive unconscious forces that lie within everyone." Elsewhere, Maurice Yacowar argues for "The Comedy of Cronenberg," Geoff Pevere makes an audacious comparison between the ill-fated *Videodrome* and Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy,* and Piers Handling convincingly handles the obligatory chore of situating Cronenberg within the national cinema.

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Though an estimable effort overall, *The Shape of Rage* often says more about the nature of contemporary film criticism than about Cronenberg, its purported occasion.

In this sense, the touchstone contribution is from Robin Wood whose singular "Cronenberg: A Dissenting View" is a considered reiteration of the adversary position he originally expressed in *The American Nightmare,* the one essential primer on the modern horror film. Wood's ideological bent is assailed almost as regularly as his psychological insights are appropriated. John Harkness's "The Word, the Flesh, and David Cronenberg" undertakes a particularly mean-spirited attack on Wood and his polemics (mostly the former), and Cronenberg himself, in a concluding interview, feels compelled to respond to his critic's "twisted" viewpoint. Also, the collection shares with many promotional efforts a too frequent resort to argument by superlative, a sure sign that its critics are protesting too much: Beard labels the finale to *Videodrome* "as great an individual piece of cinema as I know," and Handling drags in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* to note that "Wagner, too, has been prone to misinterpretation at every level, a fate that has also been Cronenberg's."

But perhaps the main problem throughout is simple prematurity: at this early point in his career, any conclusions about Cronenberg are bound to be tentative. The omission of his striking comeback *The Dead Zone* (1983), released after this edition went to press, only confirms the bad timing. In a revelatory remark during his interview with Beard and Handling, Cronenberg intimates that for the moment, at least, he too could do without the critical baggage: "I feel censored in a strange way, I feel that meanings are being twisted and imposed on me. And more than meanings—value judgments." —TOM DOHERTY

THE MAN YOU LOVED TO HATE
Erich von Stroheim and Hollywood

By Richard Koszarski. New York, Oxford University Press, 1983

Koszarski's excellent, useful study of Erich von Stroheim is part of a book/film project. A 90-minute documentary of the same title, directed by Patrick Montgomery from research and a script by Koszarski, was released in 1979. Montgomery had previously made a modest compilation film on Georges Méliès (its greatest contribution was the display of clips taken from newly discovered Méliès negatives). With greater experience, resources and with Koszarski, Montgomery produced a moving survey of Stroheim's career. The format is familiar—clips of Stroheim's films (as actor and director), interviews with associates, some stock footage and stills—but executed with impressive skill. If we lived in better cultural times, it would launch a PBS series of the director's extant work.

Koszarski's book approaches Stroheim from a different although complementary direction. While his historical methodology does not forsake interviews, it "is based largely on unpublished materials, including studio records and documents in various public and private collections." (p. 318) These range from Immigration and Naturalization Service records (only recently made available through the Freedom of Information Act), legal depositions from Stroheim's first divorce, to extensive documentation in Universal's privately held archive. The results are a badly needed departure from the reminiscence-based biography, *Stroheim,* by Thomas Curtiss and the laudatory advocacy of Herman G. Weinberg. While writing a sensitive and sympathetic biography, Koszarski avoids the partisanship which ultimately limits the value of these earlier efforts to come to grips with Stroheim's work.

Stroheim presents particular problems for an auteur analysis: none of his films survive in a form that this writer-director-actor originally intended. In the case of *Blind Husbands* (1919), 1365 feet was removed for an 1924 reissue—the only form in which the film now exists. With films like *Queen Kelly* (only partially shot and only finally released in 1932) or *Walking Down Broadway* (rewritten and reshot by others and released in 1933 as *Hello Sister*) the undermining of Stroheim's intentions began long before the projects were completed. As an antidote to these problems, Koszarski offers a production history for each film Stroheim made in Hollywood. He traces the elaboration of Stroheim's initial idea through treatment, script, shooting, post-production and until the original negative was finally junked due to nitrate deterioration. *The Man You Loved To Hate* is the essential companion for anyone taking a serious look at Stroheim's films. *Foolish Wives* was slashed so many times by so many editors outside the

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Koszarski also has uncovered a number of Stroheim's unrealized projects, including a play, *In the Morning* (deposited for copyright on November 16, 1912) which presents some of Stroheim's lasting artistic preoccupations in their earliest form (originally to be part of the appendix, the AFI now plans to publish the play as a booklet). Such preoccupations are tied to the persona Stroheim created for himself—from adding the aristocratic "von" to his name when he arrived at Ellis Island in 1909, to the list of medals he claimed to have received before immigrating and which his screen counterparts wore or received on a regular basis. The changing preoccupations of this *auteur,* as demonstrated in his work (and here "work" cannot be equated with "films") are traced over the course of his Hollywood career.

The Man You Loved to Hate is not a definitive study of Stroheim's work—such an undertaking would take volumes. Koszarski acts principally as a historian rather than a critic: he takes the methods of studio histories and applies them to this critical biography, offering an implicit critique of the auteurist approach of many director-oriented studies. Stroheim's production methods are examined as carefully as his narratives. This 343-page book does not try to do everything but maintains a consistent, delineated perspective when approaching each of Stroheim's projects. Readers looking for a detailed visual analysis of these films will be disappointed. The focus is neither on film as text nor on the audience's reception. Little attempt is made to place Stroheim's work in a broader cultural context. A feminist critique of Stroheim would yield added—though perhaps obvious—insights. Koszarski does not offer the explicit theoretical framework, methodology or rationale for his undertaking which is currently popular among many film historians. Yet, as with the writings of George Pratt and Russell Merritt, the surface modesty of this study can be deceiving.

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GEORGE ROY HILL

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Edward Shores certainly believes in the big assertion. Early in his study of George Roy Hill, he states that "his [Hill's] control of form and content and his use of the medium rank him among the best of America's directors . . . his best work is an intelligent cinematic exploration of the American experience." Unfortunately, the implicit promise to illuminate how Hill controls form and content in his films to carry out his explorations is not fulfilled. Shores's ensuing analyses of six Hill films rarely (and then only briefly) focus on how Hill employed the modalities of direction to achieve meaning in his films. Shores insists the meaning is there and he may be right, but his insistence seems unconvincing because his study is seriously deficient in the kind of rigorous analysis that clarifies the relationship between direction of a film and the meaning the film ultimately conveys.

In chapters of fewer than twenty pages each, Shores covers *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Slaughterhouse-Five, The Sting, The Great Waldo Pepper, Slapshot,* and *A Little Romance.* The weakest of these is *Butch Cassidy,* which contains almost nothing specific about Hill's direction, the ostensible subject of the study; the best is *The Sting,* which at least includes some brief observations on Hill's use of editing and composition to create parallelism in the film.

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JIRI MENZEL AND THE HISTORY OF THE CLOSELY WATCHED TRAINS

By Josef Škvorecký. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Josef Škvorecký's short (100 pages) book touches on many matters besides its ostensible subject of the way in which an "underground" and politically controversial story by Bohumil Hrabal was successively reworked to become Jiří Menzel's highly successful and virtually apolitical film. Put as bluntly as this, and keeping in mind the fact that Menzel, almost alone among the major Czech directors of the sixties, not only chose to stay in his native country, but has been able to produce films at regular intervals since, it might seem that we are to be dealing with an account of compromise, failure of nerve, and even opportunism. Škvorecký, however, who has of course the advantage of having enjoyed personal and professional contact with all the people whose work he discusses, is not willing to settle for easy moral judgments or condemnations, and his book becomes a fascinating study of the range of choices available to an artist in such circumstances as the Czechoslovakia of the sixties and seventies, and the way in which individuals responded to these choices.

Anyone who has attempted to study Eastern European cinema with even a modicum of first-hand knowledge of the situation can easily recognize the world of Škvorecký's first chapter in which he discusses the various signals and codes by which an artist can conform to official guidelines and yet send out messages that initiates at least can understand. To take an example from my own recent experience of Hungarian cinema: the casting by the much-banned Gyula Gazdag of Evald Schorm, the uncompromising conscience of the Czech cinema, in the main role of his *Singing of the Treadmill* represented a gesture of support that doubtless helped to account for the banning of that film from 1974–1984; whereas the casting of Menzel himself as the main actor in Gyula Maar's elegantly vapid *Passing Fancy* reinforces the fact that this particular film is entirely devoid of any political awareness whatever. Menzel, in fact, emerges from Škvorecký's portrait of him, and despite the many compromises and even recantations that he has made in order to continue working, as something very different from the classic time-serving official artist (represented in the book by Otakar Vávra) who is ready to shift his ideological position to suit every whim of his political masters; rather, he appears as a genuine political innocent whose only concern is to be left alone to make films on the one subject that truly obsesses him: sex.

The changes then that moved Hrabal's original story from its "morbid" and "pessimistic" origins as *The Legend of Cain* to the rather more light-hearted tragicomedy of its published version as the novella *Closely Watched Trains,* to a script and then a film that shifted the emphasis almost entirely toward the theme of sexual frustration and incidentally cleared up the Conrad-like narrative complexities of the book to provide a more straightforward and accessible story—all these involved, in Škvorecký's view, as many gains as they did losses. In his own words: ". . . it is an excellent, perhaps great film, although it may have distorted an excellent novella." Later he writes that it is "a film miles away from the original black story of Cain, and much different from the tragicomedy of the novel—but a film with subtle complexities of its own, beautifully executed, revealing the visible reality of a small corner of the world, and demonstrating the universal reality of man's joyfully dirty masculine soul through its fine script and actors."

Škvorecký is too skeptical (and perhaps too humane) to take the line advocated both by many armchair watchers of the Eastern European film scene and by such genuinely radical spirits as still survive under such regimes as the Czech one, which insists that the only worthwhile films are those in which the director lays his or her head on the block with a deliberately provocative subject or stylistic

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JIRI MENZEL AND THE HISTORY OF THE CLOSELY WATCHED TRAINS

By Josef Škvorecký. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Josef Škvorecký's short (100 pages) book touches on many matters besides its ostensible subject of the way in which an "underground" and politically controversial story by Bohumil Hrabal was successively reworked to become Jiří Menzel's highly successful and virtually apolitical film. Put as bluntly as this, and keeping in mind the fact that Menzel, almost alone among the major Czech directors of the sixties, not only chose to stay in his native country, but has been able to produce films at regular intervals since, it might seem that we are to be dealing with an account of compromise, failure of nerve, and even opportunism. Škvorecký, however, who has of course the advantage of having enjoyed personal and professional contact with all the people whose work he discusses, is not willing to settle for easy moral judgments or condemnations, and his book becomes a fascinating study of the range of choices available to an artist in such circumstances as the Czechoslovakia of the sixties and seventies, and the way in which individuals responded to these choices.

Anyone who has attempted to study Eastern European cinema with even a modicum of first-hand knowledge of the situation can easily recognize the world of Škvorecký's first chapter in which he discusses the various signals and codes by which an artist can conform to official guidelines and yet send out messages that initiates at least can understand. To take an example from my own recent experience of Hungarian cinema: the casting by the much-banned Gyula Gazdag of Evald Schorm, the uncompromising conscience of the Czech cinema, in the main role of his *Singing of the Treadmill* represented a gesture of support that doubtless helped to account for the banning of that film from 1974–1984; whereas the casting of Menzel himself as the main actor in Gyula Maar's elegantly vapid *Passing Fancy* reinforces the fact that this particular film is entirely devoid of any political awareness whatever. Menzel, in fact, emerges from Škvorecký's portrait of him, and despite the many compromises and even recantations that he has made in order to continue working, as something very different from the classic time-serving official artist (represented in the book by Otakar Vávra) who is ready to shift his ideological position to suit every whim of his political masters; rather, he appears as a genuine political innocent whose only concern is to be left alone to make films on the one subject that truly obsesses him: sex.

The changes then that moved Hrabal's original story from its "morbid" and "pessimistic" origins as *The Legend of Cain* to the rather more light-hearted tragicomedy of its published version as the novella *Closely Watched Trains,* to a script and then a film that shifted the emphasis almost entirely toward the theme of sexual frustration and incidentally cleared up the Conrad-like narrative complexities of the book to provide a more straightforward and accessible story—all these involved, in Škvorecký's view, as many gains as they did losses. In his own words: ". . . it is an excellent, perhaps great film, although it may have distorted an excellent novella." Later he writes that it is "a film miles away from the original black story of Cain, and much different from the tragicomedy of the novel—but a film with subtle complexities of its own, beautifully executed, revealing the visible reality of a small corner of the world, and demonstrating the universal reality of man's joyfully dirty masculine soul through its fine script and actors."

Škvorecký is too skeptical (and perhaps too humane) to take the line advocated both by many armchair watchers of the Eastern European film scene and by such genuinely radical spirits as still survive under such regimes as the Czech one, which insists that the only worthwhile films are those in which the director lays his or her head on the block with a deliberately provocative subject or stylistic

treatment each time out. Certainly some directors seem to flourish by working in this way, and it is impossible not to admire the courage with which others refuse to take the path of Menzel (and Hrabal too, who not only offered a public recantation but denounced and attacked his former associates) and doggedly insist in working in a way that satisfies their own conscience, or else remaining silent. Different people make different choices, as Škvorecký points out, and not all of them are dishonorable. Some choose to go into exile; some refuse all compromise and choose silence; some are forced into silence against their will; and some make what they see as necessary compromises in order that some voices at least, that are not totally at the service of the official viewpoint, may continue to be heard. The whole melancholy process, which has dominated Czech cinema for the past fifteen years, can now be seen working itself out, in virtually identical fashion, in Poland.

The book ends with a glimmer of hope in its discussion of Menzel's recent *Short Cut,* which Škvorecký sees as a genuinely personal film and one with which Menzel, without directly challenging official orthodoxies, nevertheless "returned home." If Menzel is a survivor, however, the true heroine of this book is Věra Chytilová, whose open letter to the Czech President asking him to put an end to the campaign of persecution against her and to allow her to continue making the kind of films she had shown herself equipped and qualified to make, is printed as an appendix. There is no grovelling here, no apologetics, no pleading, no promises to reform, no doubletalk, no disowning of her own previous work—simply a dignified listing of the facts of her career and an account of the appallingly petty, jealous, cowardly, and vindictive accusations and actions taken against her. Her boldness paid off to the extent that she was allowed to complete *The Apple Game* in 1977, but since then she too has been silent. If Škvorecký's account is correct, Menzel is perhaps lucky that he, in all honesty, has no political integrity to defend: his talents are not being utterly squandered or suppressed and he can make some films, at any rate, of which he need not feel ashamed. It may not be much, but in the current desert of the Czech cinema, it is at least something.

—GRAHAM PETRIE

LUCHINO VISCONTI

By Claretta Tonetti. Boston: Twayne, 1983. $24.00.

For once someone who speaks Italian and knows the culture well is writing on Italian cinema. All too many otherwise astute critics must rely on subtitles for their experience of a film, and thus necessarily miss important subtleties. Consequently, they are often led to concentrate on "universal" themes about the "human condition" at the expense of historically and culturally determined particulars. The meaning of other details like music and visual motifs also often escapes these critics, and rarely is any attention paid to *Italian* critics and historians of Italian cinema (there are a lot of them). Tonetti, on the other hand, is able to quote revealingly from Visconti's dialogue, and she has also read at least some of the massive amount of scholarship on Visconti in Italian, citing it only occasionally, but in an illuminating fashion. We also learn from her helpful cultural tidbits, such as the fact that, in Sicily, the basil plant which stands on the windowsill in *La Terra Trema* during the conversation between the policeman and the young girl symbolizes sexual temptation. Tonetti is also very good at placing this film and others in the often overlooked context of Italian fiction, and her discussion of Italian dialects is informative—though one wonders whether it was necessary to go back as far as the Roman Empire. Similarly, she usefully puts *Senso* in the context of *Risorgimento* history, but her recitals are rather pedestrian, and given the obvious space limitations the book suffers from, perhaps longer than they need to be for the purpose at hand.

However, if Tonetti knows a lot about Italy, she knows next to nothing about film. Given the fact that most books in the Twayne series begin with egregiously over-long author biographies, one is troubled by the fact that Tonetti's sketch mentions no previous work in film studies. This fear is borne out by the text, for she never mentions a film's editing, and only two or three times in the whole book does she ever refer to framing, camera movement or angle, and the like. (She displays no knowledge whatsoever of film terminology, referring in one instance to a "long distance camera shot.") Trained in literary studies,

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—JAMES ROY MacBEAN

Fellini, Federico. *Moraldo In The City & A Journey With Anita.* Edited and translated by John C. Stubbs. University of Illinois Press, Urbana: 1983. $12.95. These "scripts" are actually easily readable short stories, except for occasional indications of their intended use as the basis for shooting. They show the early evolution of Fellini's work; some items in them reappeared in later produced films. Stubbs provides background information and a generally Jungian interpretation of Fellini themes in his excellent introduction. —E.C.

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Scarecrow Press, 1983. $13.50. Bliss's analysis is mainly on the level of plot and character, but he also has many interesting things to say about De Palma's generally strong and sometimes daring style. His overall perceptions of the films are sensible (rating *Carrie* as the director's "most coherent and fully realized work," with *Sisters* not far behind) and his interpretations do not succumb to the usual Hitchcockomania about DePalma. Includes treatment of *Home Movies,* but not *The Wedding Party, Murder à la Mod,* and *Dionysus in 69,* which are unavailable at present. Bliss makes many interesting observations about all the films. *Hi, Mom,* he points out, has De Niro doing Travis Bickle four years before *Taxi Driver.* He traces the intricate doubling (and even, briefly, trebling) in *Sisters.* And, though he is not uncritical of DePalma, he defends both *Dressed to Kill* and *Blow Out* as serious works. An articulate interview with DePalma, done while *Scarface* was in preparation, concludes the volume, together with filmography and (very skimpy) bibliography. —E.C.

Feldman, Seth R. *Dziga Vertov: A Guide to References and Resources.* Boston, 1979. Both Vertov's own work and the voluminous literature about him are to some degree inaccessible, but gradually more becomes available. Feldman has chosen to err, in cases of doubt, by including items which may or may not ever come to light. His biographical sketch gives a careful account of Vertov's life and he also provides a short critical perspective on the films. The bulk of the book comprises detailed, almost shot-by-shot descriptions of Vertov's extant films, and an annotated guide to writings about him. An excellent companion volume to *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov,* just published by the University of California Press. —E.C.

Darretta, John. *Vittorio De Sica.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983. $48.00. Brief biographical sketch, critical survey, and credits plus synopses of the films. The bibliography also includes published screenplays and sources of films, and there is a section listing De Sica's stage performances (he was very active as both a stage and screen actor, in addition to his work as director). —E.C.

Barrett, Gerald R. and Wendy Brabner. *Stan Brakhage.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983. $42.00. About two thirds of this volume is devoted to an intriguing biography, critical survey, and detailed shot-by-shot descriptions of many of Brakhage's films, with notes on the contents of the others (up to 1980); the rest is devoted to annotated listings of writings about and by Brakhage. —E.C.

Lenburg, Jeff. *The Great Cartoon Directors.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1983. $16.95. Though written in a rather pedestrian fashion, at least compared to some essays on the delights of animation, this is a useful compilation of historical information on the work of Friz Freleng, Ub Iwerks, Chuck Jones, Hanna and Barbera, Bob Clampett, Tex Avery, Walter Lantz, Dave Fleischer, and others. The illustrations cover both humans and cartoon characters. —E.C.

Monti, Rafaela. Bottega Fellini. *La città delle donne: Progetto, laborazione, film.* Roma: De Luca, 1981. 40,000 lire (about $40). The value of this book lies in its method of documenting Fellini's creative process through image and illustration drawn from every phase of the film's production. Monti's original approach is not to examine the end product, but to analyze the director's philosophy of making a film as found in the process itself. *Bottega Fellini* consists of an introduction, five chapters of text and illustration, and the film credits. In Chapter 1, Fellini's personal code of symbols is translated into "historical themes" such as the circus and religious ceremonials. Monti places Fellini in "that typically Italian tradition which contemplates films as a mode of re-meditating, reliving, and re-examining historical forms of the spectacle." Monti discusses Fellini's roles as scriptwriter and cartoonist (Chapters 2 and 3), pointing out the constant revisions and improvisations on the set which elaborate and transform his original themes. Fellini's sketches are themselves the true visual script

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of *La città delle donne,* revealing his psychological and emotional complexity. That Fellini works primarily in image even in the early conceptual stages confirms that the director's approach to his work is intuitive and associational, derived from "the logic of the psyche." Chapter 4 is a comprehensive and graphic account of the actual filming. Here we see how Fellini's fantastic sketches become actual set designs: the Feminist Convention, Katzone, the Toboggan, the Ring. Production stills reveal Fellini's style of interaction with his players, as well as the dramatic effects of lighting. In the final chapter, a series of annotated stills gives us a visual synopsis of the finished film. *Bottega Fellini* is a well produced book. Photographs and sketches give a rich documentation of the production process. It is regrettable that equal attention could not be given to the post-production phase; however, Monti's record truly captures the art of a great film-maker at work.

—GAETANA MARRONE-PUGLIA

Sen, Mrinal. *In Search of Famine* [Akaler Sandhaney]. Seagull Books, 26 Circus Avenue (1st floor), Calcutta 700 017 India, 1983. Rs. 35. This is a reconstructed script of the 1980 film which won a prize at Berlin and many national awards; its story tells of a film director's effort to portray the 1943 Bengal famine in which several million people died. Illustrations. —E.C.

Suid, Lawrence Howard, ed. *Air Force.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Suid's introduction describes how Hawks's devotion to aerial reality nearly led to catastrophe in the shooting of this gung-ho World War II movie—rivalled only by *30 Seconds Over Tokyo.* —E.C.

Vanderwood, Paul J., ed. *Juárez.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. The introduction tells how a bizarre episode of Mexican history (Maximilian, an Austrian, was installed as king by Napoleon's army, but showed democratic sympathies alarming to his backers) was turned into a Warners Good Neighbor movie. E.C.

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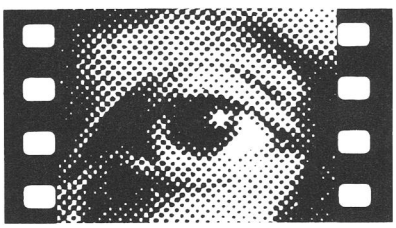

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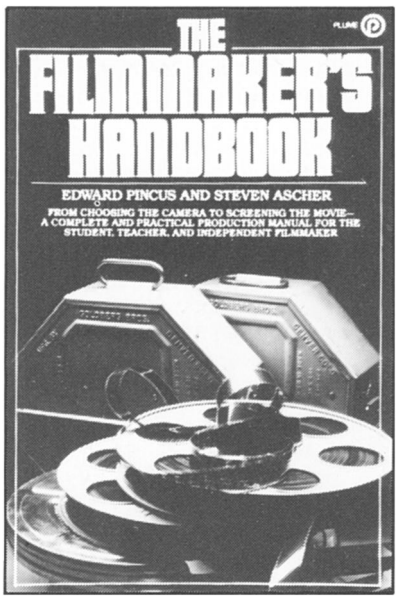

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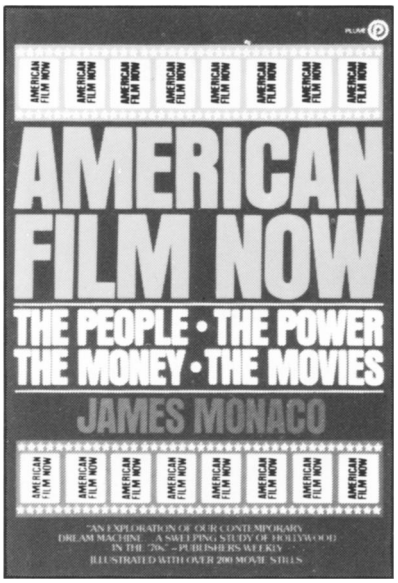

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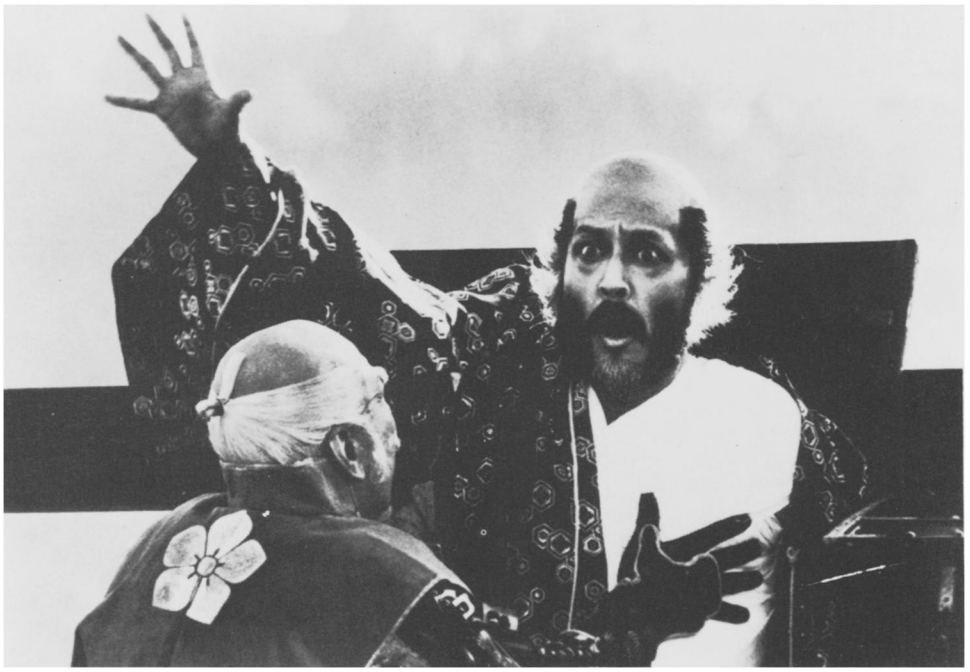

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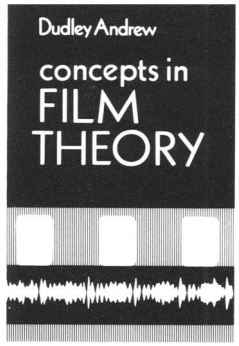

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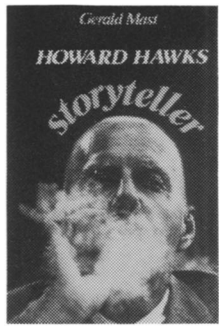

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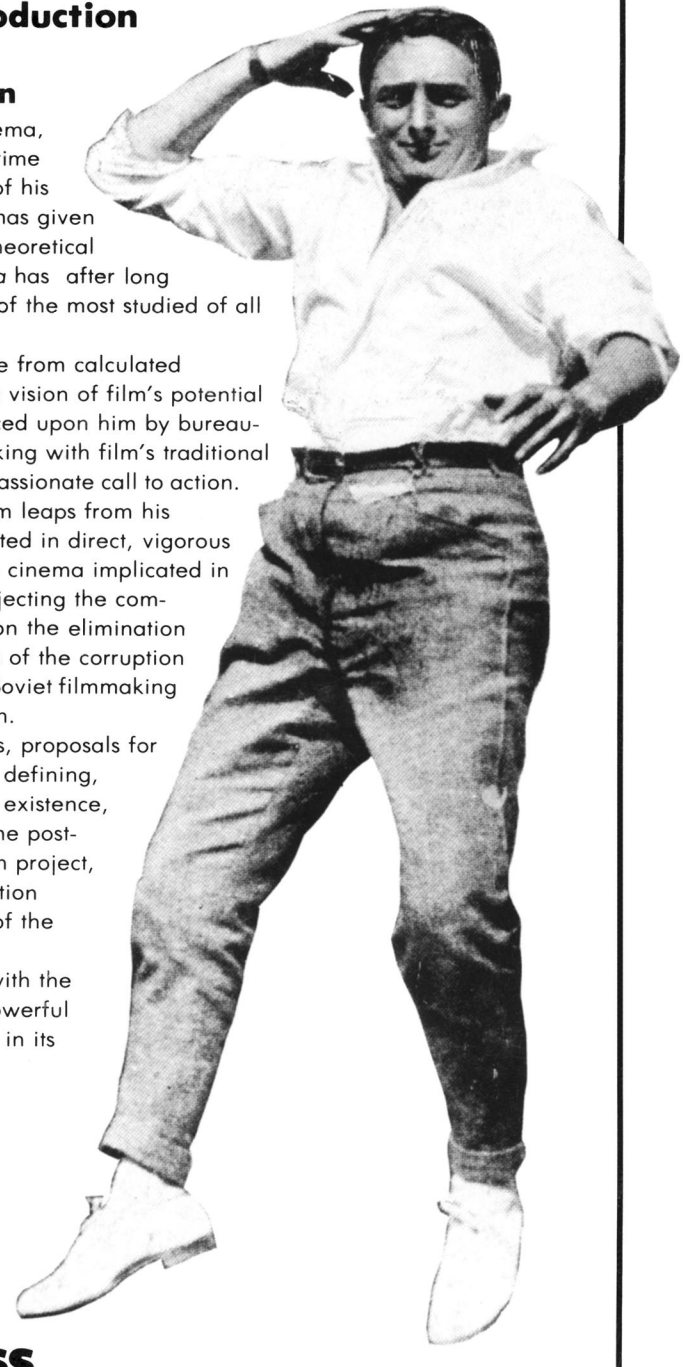

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